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HISTORY OF ORIGIN, DISTRIBUTION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF WATERMELON (CITRULLUS)

Abdullayev Mavlonbek Farxod og'li
Independent researcher at Tashkent State Agrarian University
Email: abdullayevmavlonbek43@gmail.com

Abstract:*This article provides information on the origin and distribution of watermelons, the countries that produce the most today, and their medicinal properties for the human body.*

Keywords: *watermelon, product, variety, melon, crop, plant, vitamin, species, genus, family, temperature, stem, fruit, yield.*

INTRODUCTION:

In the current era of consistent agricultural reform, ensuring the population's demand for agricultural products is fully met and improving supply are urgent issues. Successfully addressing these issues requires special attention to the primary processing of agricultural products. Melon farming is the branch of agriculture concerned with growing melons, watermelons and pumpkins. Melon crops are highly nutritious and dietary due to their high content of easily digestible carbohydrates, sugars, vitamins, and mineral salts.

In our Republic, measures to strengthen melon production, improve quality and reduce post-harvest losses are seen as crucial to meeting demand. Uzbekistan is one of the world's leading melon producers. The country grows sweet melons and other high-quality melon products. Melon crops are cultivated for food, fodder and technical purposes. Several varieties adapted to specific regions exist. If the correct varieties are chosen for the climate and ecological conditions, and the appropriate agronomic methods are applied, abundant harvests can be obtained.

Watermelon is the most widely cultivated melon crop in our country. Watermelon pulp and juice are used to treat anaemia, inflammation, issues with bile secretion, and metabolic disorders. Watermelon also removes toxins and waste products from the body and accelerates cholesterol breakdown. Watermelons contain vitamins A, C, E and B-group vitamins, as well as magnesium, potassium, calcium, phosphorus, iron and sodium. Watermelon is 91% water and contains 5–13% easily digestible sugars. Due to its high sugar content, people with diabetes are advised to consume watermelon in limited amounts. Watermelon also contains the amino acid L-citrulline, which helps to relieve joint pain.

Origin and distribution:The watermelon was first cultivated in the 2nd century BC. India is considered to be its centre of origin. Today, melon crops are cultivated in tropical, subtropical and temperate regions worldwide. Melon crops occupy 2.8–2.9 million hectares globally, 70% of which is devoted to watermelon. The leading producers of watermelons include China, India, the USA, Russia, Uzbekistan, Japan and Ukraine, with each producing around 1 million tonnes of melons annually. Around 95% of watermelon varieties have been collected in southern Russia, the USA, China, Japan and Central Asia.

Botanical characteristicsMelon crops belong to the Cucurbitaceae family. This family of angiosperms comprises around 103 genera and over 1,100 species. Most of these species grow in tropical and subtropical regions, and are annual creeping or climbing plants.

Watermelon belongs to the Citrullus genus. There are two types of cultivated watermelon: edible (Citrullus vulgaris Schrad.) and fodder (Citrullus pateca Sagent), as well as several wild species with a bitter taste.

In our climate, watermelon, melon, and muscat pumpkin are grown in large quantities. For germination, watermelon seeds require a soil temperature of +14–16°C. Planting before soil warms up is not recommended. Watermelon is a light-demanding plant; in shaded areas it grows poorly or dies. Its root system consists of a main taproot with numerous lateral roots. The stem and leaves spread along the ground, and vines can reach 2–3 meters in length. Tendrils grow from the leaf axils, enabling the plant to cling to surrounding objects.In varieties cultivated in our region, five types of flowers are observed: functional male and true male flowers, functional female and true female flowers, and hermaphrodite flowers. Watermelon fruits are diverse in shape (spherical, oval, pear-shaped, elliptical, cylindrical, etc.). Fruits can be large, medium, or small, with rind colors ranging from light green, green, dark green, to yellow. The flesh is pink, red, rarely yellow, or white. Seeds differ in size (large, medium, small) and in color (white, yellowish, brown, red, or black). One thousand seeds weigh 50–100 g.According to the State Register of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 47 watermelon varieties are recorded, 15 of which are local and the rest foreign. The growing period of early-ripening varieties is 80–85 days, while late-ripening varieties require 120–130 days.Typical features of melon crops include the presence of tendrils, unisexual flowers, pollination by insects (entomophily), and male flowers that last only one day (opening in the morning and closing in the evening). The fruit is a pepo; seeds are exalbuminous, with a large embryo and two flat cotyledons. Cucurbitaceae plants are heat- and drought-tolerant, light-demanding, short-day crops that are not very demanding in terms of soil fertility.

Conclusion:The cultivation of melons and watermelons is increasing year on year. This is because these fruits are rich in vitamins and minerals that act as natural remedies for the human body. Watermelon in particular helps to regulate kidney function and cleanse the body of accumulated toxins. However, it should be consumed in moderation.

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