

K-State Extension Connection



It's Melon Season! Serve Them Safe!

Barbara L. Ames

Wildcat District Extension Family and Consumer Sciences
Agent

Summer and fresh, juicy melons are a perfect match!

However, the recent multi-state salmonella outbreak linked to precut melons is an important reminder that safe handling and preparing of watermelon, cantaloupes, honeydew and other melons is very important.

Most of us purchase melons at the grocery store or farmers market, so it is easy to forget that melons grow on the ground, and they are exposed to pests and microorganisms from the soil. Outbreaks involving poorly washed melons, particularly cantaloupes, are not a new thing. For instance, in September/October 2012, 261 people in 24 states were infected as a result of a *Salmonella* outbreak caused by tainted cantaloupe grown in Indiana (<http://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/typhimurium-cantaloupe-08-12/index.html>). The previous year, cantaloupes grown on a Colorado farm led to a *Listeriosis* outbreak, infecting 84 Americans (<http://www.cdc.gov/listeria/outbreaks/cantaloupes-jensen-farms/093011/index.html>).

What can you do to prevent becoming ill from contaminated melons? Whether home grown, or purchased at the store or farmers' market, use these guidelines to select, prepare, and safely enjoy melons in your home.

- Select a melon with no imperfections. Damage to rinds can cause mold growth or other bacteria to travel to the inside of the melon.
- Before cutting the melon, wash your hands with warm, soapy water. Also, be sure equipment and utensils are clean and sanitized, including your sink.
- Next, wash the melon under cool running water and scrub the outside rind with a produce brush, then dry with a paper towel. This may not seem important since you do not eat the rind. But when you slice the melon, bacteria on the outside of the melon are easily transferred to the

inner edible area. Using soap or detergent to clean your produce is not recommended. Produce washes are not harmful, but are not necessary. After cutting the melon, wash your hands again.

- Store cut melons in a clean container in the refrigerator at a temperature of 41 degrees F or below. Label the melon with the date and discard any melon not eaten within a week. Note: Uncut melons do not need to be refrigerated.

To view tips on melon preparation, check out this video from Iowa State University:
<https://youtu.be/gQNai8ASBEs>.

For more information about these programs and others, contact the Wildcat Extension District offices at: Crawford County, 620-724-8233; Labette County, 620-784-5337; Montgomery County, 620-331-2690; Wilson County, 620-378-2167; Pittsburg Office, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education (EFNEP), 620-232-1930. Wildcat District Extension is on the Web at <http://www.wildcatdistrict.ksu.edu>. Or, like our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/wildcat.extension.district.

K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.