



A vegetable of the botanical family Cucurbitaceae, watermelon is related to cucumbers, squash and pumpkins. The beautiful tableware pictured is from Midnite Pottery of Tupelo, MS.

Wild for Watermelon

BY CHELLE ELLIS / PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANA FINIMORE

Watermelon, or *Citrullus lanatus*, makes the hottest days in the South a little more bearable. When much of the garden has gone to seed or surrendered to the scorching sun, the watermelon is just beginning its summer song.

The watermelon's connection with picnics and barbecues summons happy memories. Perhaps it's the search for these "feel-good moments" that triggered the creation of more than two dozen watermelon festivals throughout the country.

Mississippi hosts two festivals: Mize's Mississippi Watermelon Festival and the Water Valley Watermelon Carnival. The latter began as a promotion stunt to attract growers and a market to the good growing conditions the area offered for melon farming. The Water Valley Junior Chamber of Commerce hosted the first melon carnival in their Depression-ravaged town on

August 27, 1931.

Anyone attending a watermelon festival is guaranteed to consume and develop a new appreciation of the different varieties of watermelon. At the grander events, you can enjoy unique floats celebrating the melon and lay your eyes on a real, honest-to-goodness Watermelon Queen.

Water Valley's Carnival days came to an end when the nation's attention shifted to World War II but returned forty years later, in 1980. Today, thousands travel to the city each year to participate in the city's tribute to this vegetable sweet enough to be a fruit.

It's hard to believe something so sweet can be healthy as well. Watermelon is 92 percent water and contains no fat or cholesterol. It is an excellent source of vitamins A, B6, C and contains fiber and potassium. Vitamin B6 helps create neurotransmitters, such as

serotonin, melatonin and dopamine, which aid in coping with anxiety and panic and regulating moods.

Watermelon also contains high concentrations of lycopene, an antioxidant that preliminary research shows may help prevent some types of cancer.

Watermelons are most successfully grown in mounds of sandy loam, compost and fertilizer, placed approximately eight feet apart. After the last frost, plant several seeds in a ring about a foot in diameter on each hill. Thin later to two plants per hill, keeping them weeded and hoed, careful not to bruise or



injure the vines.

The "curl" growing out from the stem will die when the melon is ripe, but many other methods are used to indicate harvest day: Some people thump the melon, listening for the perfect hollow sound to come forth before they are satisfied. Others, like James Hawkins of Hernando Farmer's Market, swear by the "straw test," whereby a piece of straw turns lengthwise when placed on a ripe melon.

"My grandfather always kept a straw in his pocket," Hawkins says with a twinkle in his eye. "He wouldn't pull a melon from the field unless the straw moved when he set it on it."

If you are buying a melon from the market, always choose a firm watermelon, symmetrical in shape and free of bruises, cuts and dents. The melon should be heavy from its water content and yellow on the underside, showing that it ripened in the sun. Once you get it home, it will keep at room temperature for seven to ten days. Avoid refrigerator storage, as it will break down the rind and produce a mushy, mealy texture.

If you want to enjoy your melon in the traditional sense, wash the outside thoroughly, quarter it, and cut

each quarter into three or four wedges. Or try your hand with timeless recipes for watermelon rind pickles and watermelon wine, often found in old cookbooks or at www.watermelon.org.

Quick-and-easy tricks include freezing watermelon juice in ice trays then adding the frozen treats to a glass of lemonade. Impress your next gathering by scooping the flesh from a watermelon into balls and carving the rind into an attractive serving basket to house the melon balls and colorful, tasty fruits.

Add more melon to your life with these unique recipes:

WATERMELON MARGARITA

- 1-1/2 ounces tequila
- 3/4 ounce triple sec
- 3/4 ounce melon liqueur
- 2 ounces sour mix
- 6 ounces cubed, seeded watermelon
- 8 ounces ice

Blend all ingredients together; serve in a 14-ounce glass. Garnish with lime and watermelon wedge.

WATERMELON SALSA

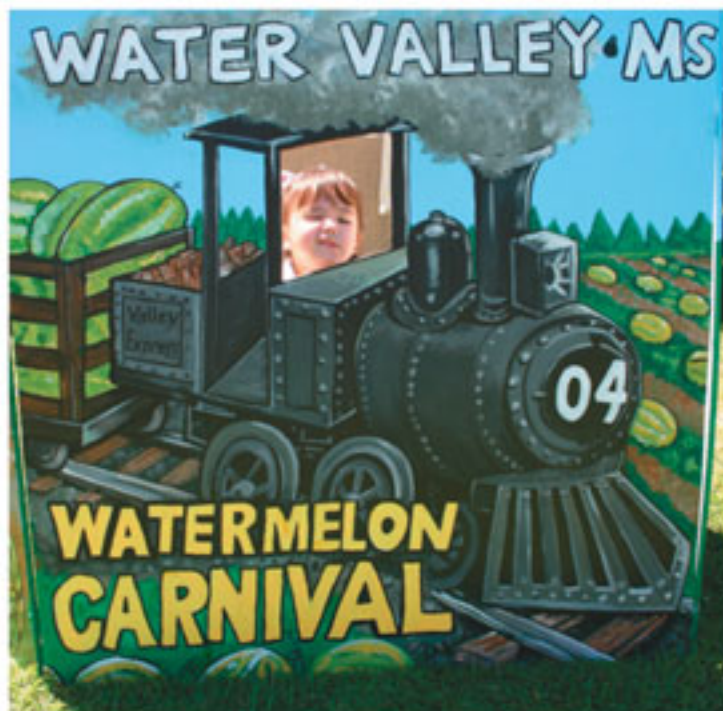
- 2 cups chopped watermelon (seeds removed)
- 3/4 cup chopped Walla Walla sweet onion
- 3/4 cup canned black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1/4 cup chopped, seeded jalapeno chilies
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 large clove garlic, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

Stir together all ingredients in bowl. Refrigerate, covered at least one hour to blend flavors. Stir before serving.

WATERMELON SALAD

- 2 cups seeded small watermelon balls
- 2 cups fresh mozzarella pieces
- 1 cup chopped fresh basil (purple or green)
- 1 bunch scallions, trimmed and chopped
- 1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Balsamic vinegar as desired

Toss together the watermelon, mozzarella, basil, scallions and oil. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve over a bed of baby greens with crostini (small, thin slices of toasted French or Italian bread topped antipasto, etc.) on the sides. Drizzle with balsamic vinegar if desired.



MISSISSIPPI WATERMELON FESTIVALS

Mize Watermelon Festival

Watermelon at it's best! Live entertainment, music, arts & crafts, family fun. Watermelon seed-spitting contest, greased watermelon race and watermelon eating contest. Proceeds benefit the local volunteer fire department. July 22-23 2005.

Mize City Park

Mize, MS

Smith County

601.733.5647 or 733.2218

Contact: Terresa Stewart/Lynn Lowery

Admission \$3 Adults, \$2 Children

Watermelon Carnival

Exciting fun and entertainment celebrates the delectable watermelon. Arts and crafts, concessions and live entertainment are offered, along with a Musicfest, a 5k run/walk, lawnmower race, antique car show and square dancing. The fun begins on Thursday evening and continues through Saturday.

August 5-6 2005

Water Valley City Park

Water Valley, MS

Yalobusha County

662.473.1122

1.887.604.5462

mailto:watervalley@yalobushaonline.com

Contact: Bonnie Cox

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(LOCAL FLAVOR)

Escape to Como

BY CHELLE ELLIS / PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEN ELLIS

Looking for a quiet place to spend a romantic weekend? Find it in quaint Como, Mississippi. Como is where many fond memories are made. It boasts the perfect atmosphere for a charming wedding or a simple, relaxing dining experience.

Como's Main Street conjures magic experienced by merely walking down the strip. The town's history is palpable, making visitors feel they have journeyed back to a simpler time.

Five years ago, Como's primary claim to fame was the Como Steakhouse, revered for excellent steaks. Rick King and Gary May bought an old mercantile store, turned it into an open-pit restaurant and opened in December 2000.

The men preserved the integrity of the historic setting while offering a fresh perspective to its customers. Antique chandeliers drop from ceilings made of aged tin panels. Old photographs of regal ladies adorn the walls of the Magnolia Room, a private dining area.

Today the steakhouse still serves its famous steaks, but has added salmon, chicken, shrimp and catfish to the menu. Charlene Renis runs the kitchen, preparing homemade salad dressings and her delectable "Como Delight" dessert, while steaks and other meats are cooked in front of customers on open charcoal pits near the dining areas.

A favorite steak is the 24-ounce bone-in rib-eye: "The bone in any steak helps to give it flavor," King advises, adding the beef he serves has been aged at least 21 days to be tender and flavorful.

People come from all over to eat at Como Steakhouse: Cordova, Germantown, Oxford, even as far as Vicksburg.

"Folks in Memphis really don't mind an hour's drive. They look forward to getting away from Memphis to come down here," King explains.

A recent addition to the restaurant is Oyster Blues, an oyster bar featuring casual dining with balcony seating and specializing in grilled Cajun cuisine. Both Oyster Blues and the steakhouse offer a full bar, but maintain an atmosphere appropriate for family dining.

Besides the Magnolia Room, the Blues Room seats 50 people with additional seating in the balcony to accommodate 25 more.

If an event requires more space, book 211 Main Hall and Gardens, a banquet hall equipped to handle crowds of up to 300 and also owned by King and May. It's located a few doors down from the steakhouse and features a main party room and a walled area with gardens. In addition to parties and weddings, it has held two events honoring Gov. Haley Barbour.



The omnipresent King and his wife Kay also own Como Courtyard Bed & Breakfast, an enchanting old home that was also once a mercantile store. A private courtyard connects the main house to the cottage and provides a pleasing combination of the beauties of nature and romance.

A cottage is available for rent with the main house if additional space is required. Often used for smaller weddings, honeymoons and anniversaries, the Courtyard can be booked through



their Web site at www.comocourtyard.net.

Other notable Como shops include Blades of Grass, featured in a separate story in this issue of DeSoto Magazine, and an art gallery and cappuccino bar called Hope & Art.

At Hope & Art, anything from oil paintings and handmade pottery to Swarovski crystal jewelry and tie-dyed clothing are available. And don't forget to enjoy the coffee and pastries.

Before leaving Como, take the Historical Walking Tour of the city. Eleven historic homes and buildings dating back to the late 1800s are mapped out, with information about each, in a brochure available at the Como Library and most shops on the main strip. *

(POTLUCK)

summer refreshment: Southern Style

BY MARIA HILL / PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHELLE & ASHLEY ELLIS



Summers in the South are often spent close to an air conditioner, in a refreshing pool or lake, and sipping cold drinks on the front porch. As Southerners, we try everything under the blazing sun to stay cool. If the usual summer refreshments aren't giving you the "chill," then maybe it's time for something new.

These marvelously refreshing drinks will hit the spot on hot and humid summer days. Our recipes are easy and quick to make. They can be whipped up while the kids are drying off after a swim or even for a simple and tasty treat on a day reserved for relaxation.

These summer drinks are also perfect for that summer get-together you've planned or for the Fourth of July or any other festive occasion, for that matter. Have fun with these healthy, luscious and cool liquids. Quench your thirst with the "chill" you've been longing for.

ORANGE FROST

1/2 cup orange juice, chilled
1/2 cup ginger ale
1 scoop vanilla ice cream

Combine orange juice and ginger ale, mixing well. Pour into a tall glass and add ice cream. Garnish with an orange slice and serve with straw and ice tea spoon.

JUST PEACHY

1 cup sliced, peeled, ripe peaches
2 teaspoons lemon juice
1/2 cup milk
3/4 cup ice cubes
1 tablespoon sugar
Mint sprigs and peach slices for garnish

Combine peaches and lemon juice in a blender. Process on medium speed until peaches are chopped fine. Add

milk. Mix again, adding ice cubes one at a time, add sugar, blending until mixture is smooth. Pour into tall glasses, garnishing each with peaches and mint sprig.

WATERMELON SMOOTHIE

- 2 cups seeded watermelon chunks
- 1 cup cracked ice
- 1/2 cup plain yogurt
- 1-2 tablespoons sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1/8 teaspoon almond extract

Combine all ingredients in blender container. Blend until smooth. Makes 2-3 servings.

FROZEN MOCHA FRAPPACCINO

- 3/4 cup coffee (the stronger the better- ideally double strength)
- 3 tblsp. chocolate syrup
- 2 to 3 tbs sugar (or to taste)
- 2 cups of ice
- 1 cup of milk
- whipped cream and maraschino cherries (for garnish)

Make double strength coffee. Chill before use. Combine all the ingredients in a blender and blend until ice is crushed and smooth. Garnish with whipped cream and a cherry. Makes two 16 ounce drinks.

BANANA SMOOTHIE

- 1/2 cup of honey
- 3/4 tsp of vanilla extract
- 2 large bananas (sliced)
- 1 1/2 cups of vanilla flavored yogurt
- 1 cup of ice

Combine the ingredients in the blender in the order listed and mix on a low speed. Gradually increase the blending speed until desired texture.



 An advertisement for Stroud Photography. The top half features the name 'STROUD' in a large, serif font, with a camera lens icon replacing the letter 'O'. Below it, the word 'photography' is written in a cursive script. To the left is a vintage camera on a wooden tripod. To the right is a list of services:

- Fine Portraiture
- Seniors
- Families
- Schools
- Sports

 At the bottom, contact information is provided:

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 An advertisement for DeSoto Magazine Online. It features a screenshot of the website's homepage. The website has a green header with the 'DeSoto Magazine' logo and navigation links for 'Home', 'Articles', 'Recipes', 'Subscribe', 'Advertise', and 'Contact Us'. Below the header, there are four main categories listed: 'Recipes', 'Articles', 'Events', and 'Subscriptions'. To the right of these categories is a stack of magazine covers. The bottom half of the advertisement has a dark green background with the text:

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