



UNIVERSITY OF  
FLORIDA

EXTENSION

Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## Melons: Safe Handling Practices for Consumers<sup>1</sup>

Amy Simonne<sup>2</sup>

Did you know that most melons are grown on the ground? This means that they are exposed to pests and microorganisms from dirt. It is very important to wash melons well before cutting them. This applies to home grown or store bought melons.



Since 1990, many people have gotten sick from eating poorly washed melons. Many of the illnesses have been caused by cantaloupes. One outbreak, in April/May 2001, was due to *Salmonella poona*. There were a total of 46 illnesses, including two deaths, in 14 states.

In response to the outbreaks, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) updated its guidelines for safe melon practices. These guidelines are given below.

### Before Cutting Melons

■ Wash hands thoroughly with hot, soapy water before and after:



- handling fresh produce
- handling raw meat, poultry, or seafood
- using the bathroom
- changing diapers
- handling pets

- Wash the outer surface of the melon thoroughly with cool tap water to remove surface dirt. **Scrub, if necessary**, with a clean produce brush.



- Wash equipment and utensils that will come in contact with cut melons (cutting boards, knives, etc.) thoroughly with hot soapy water. Rinse, **sanitize**, and air-dry.
- Sanitize kitchen sink frequently to prevent a build up of microbes.

1. This publication is FCS8744, one of a series of the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, IFAS, University of Florida. Adapted from the FDA Manual Retail Food Safety Produce Safety at Retail: Safe Handling Practices for Melons. Publication date: November 2002. Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>

2. Amy Simonne, Ph.D., assistant professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Cooperative Extension Service, IFAS, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611. Reviewed by Linda B. Bobroff, Ph.D., RD, LD/N, associate professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, and Jeffrey K. Brecht, Ph.D., professor, Department of Horticultural Science, IFAS, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611.

**To sanitize:**

- Mix one teaspoon chlorine bleach in one quart water.
- Pour the mixture onto surface or submerge into solution and let sit at least one minute.
- Rinse well with hot running water.

- Counter tops can be sanitized by using the above solution mix, sanitizing sprays or wipes after they are washed with soap and water for an additional safety measure.

**Cutting and Preparing Melons**

- At home, it is acceptable to use your clean



bare hands to touch melons for your own consumption.

- To protect yourself and your family, you can use plastic gloves or appropriate utensils to touch cut melons.

- Peel melon after washing to reduce chance of contamination from fruit surface.

**After Cutting Melons**

- Store cut melons in a clean container in the refrigerator at a temperature of 41° F or below.
- Label the container with the date. Eat cut melons within the next week. Discard after seven days.
- Keep track of time when cut melons are left without refrigeration. Cut melons may stay at room temperature for four hours or less.
- Uneaten cut melons must be thrown away at the end of four hours.

**NOTE:** Uncut melons do not need to be refrigerated.

For more information, visit the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) website at: <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov> or call FDA Consumer Inquiries at 1-888-SAFEFOOD (a toll-free number).