

Daily Dish

Why and How to Buy Cantaloupe

Cantaloupes reach their peak ripeness between June and August. These melons, related to summer squash, resemble pumpkin and butternut squash in their high potassium and vitamin C content. They're a great choice for a fruit starting in Phase 2 of the South Beach Diet. Limit yourself to 1/4 melon or 1 cup of chopped fruit.

Buying

Cantaloupes are picked when ripe and stop ripening once they leave the vine. This makes it essential to choose a melon that was picked at just the right time. How can you tell if a cantaloupe is ready to eat? The color should be slightly golden under the mesh-like rind (avoid fruit with a dull-green appearance); the rind should cover the whole fruit. The stem end should have a slight indentation, and the other end should yield to gentle pressure. A ripe melon will not be flattened or lopsided, but it's natural to see some bleaching on the side where it was lying on the ground.

Storing

Though cantaloupes don't require further ripening, you can improve the taste by storing them at room temperature for a couple of days. The sweetness won't change, but they will become softer and juicier. Cantaloupe should be refrigerated once cut, and it's best to eat it within two days. Store cut pieces in an airtight plastic bag.

Preparing

Cantaloupe is a snap to prepare — simply cut it open and remove the seeds and strings. You can use a spoon to scoop out the flesh and eat it on the spot. For a more attractive presentation, cut the fruit into wedges or scoop it out with a melon baller. Cantaloupe can be consumed as is or tossed into a fresh fruit salad.