

GROWING DEMAND FOR ODD SHAPED WATERMELONS



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Watermelon (*Citrullus lanatus*) is an annual plant belongs to the family Cucurbitaceae. Climate suitable for watermelon cultivation ranges from tropical to temperate with pH between 5.5 and 7. It is the best fruit for consumers during summer seasons because it contains 91% water and 6% sugars. The presence of high amount of water helps to reduce thirst and prevent dehydration. It also contains vitamins A, C, B6 and potassium. Watermelon is highly recommended for liver patients as it provides cooling effect on the liver. The fruit type is pepo, which has thick rind (exocarp) and fleshy center (mesocarp and endocarp). The general shape of watermelon are oval or round. But, recently square, cube, heart and pyramidal shaped watermelons are trending in the market.

Reasons for the production of odd shaped watermelons

Huge size of watermelon cause many problems including consumption of huge place, difficulty in accommodation in to a refrigerator and need of extra packaging. Also due to round shape it move around while cutting in to pieces. So farmers of Japan decided to change the shape in to convenient forms such as square, cube, heart, pyramidal etc. They took many years for the successful production of differently shaped fruits. This helped easy transportation and handling. Shop keepers are willing to sell this fruit because they are easier to stack and cost effective to ship. Due to its easy handling exportation also increased and consumers started buying odd shaped watermelons. The odd shaped watermelon came up as solution to buyer's who feel difficulty to fit ordinary watermelon in their fridge.

How to produce odd shaped watermelons

Production of odd shaped watermelon is a simple process and every one can easily produce it. It is not produced through genetic modification or cross breeding. Farmers keep baby watermelon inside the acrylic boxes or mold of particular shape and melon adapt that shape while growing. Screw the mold tightly. In order to reach uniform sunlight on the melon transparent mold or glasses are used. Regular inspection, watering and pest control should be done. watermelon fill the mold and become the mold's shape at the time of harvest. The harvesting of melon should be done at proper time to prevent wastage. So far cube, heart, square, pyramidal shaped fruits are available in the market. Among this, square shaped watermelons are easy to produce and popular compared to the other shapes. Square shaped watermelons are preferred by the consumers for its easy handling, cutting and storage in the refrigerator. It also reduced the space requirement.



Market value

The proverb 'rarity brings high prices' has proven universally true in the case of odd shaped watermelons. Now a days, they are conquering the markets over normal watermelons. Consumers are attracted to the melons for their uniqueness. The tourists are also attracted to this fruit and become popular outside the country. This opened an export market in Japan. Odd shaped watermelons are used for gifting purpose. Because it is suitable for packaging and attractive too. Japanese consider gifting watermelon as a luxury items during festivals and functions. They claim that it has good sent and texture.

Market value of this watermelons increasing day by day. Square shaped watermelons have high demand and price compared to normal watermelons. The price is 3-4 times higher than the oval shaped melons. High demand in the market encouraged the farmers of Japan to grow odd shaped watermelons. This paved a way for the increase in export market and currently those melons are exporting to different countries such as Russia, Thailand etc. Not only water melons

but also different odd shaped fruits are available in the market. Japanese square watermelon consider as a luxurious fruit in Russia. Farm lands of Germany started cultivating this watermelon. Due to its high price people of Japan prefer this fruit to show love and care.

Watermelon is a non-climacteric fruit. It doesn't ripe after the harvest. Odd shaped watermelons may harvest before the maturity, which cause a reduction in the sweetness compared to normal watermelons. Some people buy differently shaped watermelons only for gifting purpose because of its taste difference.

Conclusion

Production of odd shaped watermelons are grabbing the attention of world's market. High price and demand attracted the farmers to grow those fruits. Farmers of Japan growing odd shaped watermelons over 30 years. Now world market focussing on this melon and increased export.