Melon Duck & Melon Swan

INGREDIENTS: For each bird: 1 firm, fairly large cantaloupe, Crenshaw or honeydew melon.

TOOLS & SUPPLIES: A paring knife, a knife with a blade that is longer than your melon, 2 wooden skewers, 1 small spoon plus melon duck and swan patterns on pages 139-141

TIPS & TIMING: Duck: 10 minutes; swan, 20 minutes. Melons are easily bruised so handle cut pieces very carefully. Make them up a day ahead but store them with their wings unextended and tightly wrapped in plastic. You'll notice I don't put eyes on my ducks and swans. It's not that I'm lazy; I just like them that way. If you want to give yours a bird's eye view of your party, by all means do soy Use cloves or seeds from the fruit itself.

USE: Table-top centerpieces
DUCK

1. On a cutting board, hold melon with its stem end pointing straight up. You want to cut as large a slice as possible off 1 side but just miss seed pocket. Hold your blade over melon halfway between stem depression and side of melon. Cut straight down. This slice is 1/4 of width of melon.

2. Lay melon duck pattern onto flat side of this oval slice with beak pointing toward 1 end—the right end if you're right handed and to the left for left-handed persons. Lightly trace pattern with tip of your paring knife. Remove and dry pattern. Cut most of excess melon away (block-cut around duck head design.) Hold your wing knife at a right angle to the flat side of the blocked-out slice and saw cut in from front of beak up over head and down back of neck. Now cut along bottom of beak and front of neck. Soften edges of duck's head with your paring knife.

3. With a small spoon, hollow out seed pocket. Clean it well, but don't scoop out any melon flesh.

4. There are 3 sets of wings. They run along length of melon. Imagine stem end of melon is a clock face. The V-shaped set begins at 12 o'clock at top and center. The L-shaped side sets begin at 2:30 and 3:00. Do not cut any sets too deeply. The ribs in between wing cavities will be too thin to support top set of wings unless they are 2 inches thick. Stop short of middle of melon. You will probably cut into seed cavity by fourth wedge in your wing sets. No problem. These holes won't be visible in finished product. Make walls of wedges as thick as 2 nickels or thicker if your melon is extra-large. Try to make 5 wedges per set.
5. The head is set into front of top cavity opposite stem end. Cut 1 pointed end off 2 wooden picks. Cut flesh side off bottom of neck forming a V that fits into bottom of cavity. Set neck in place. Pass your 2 pick points in first through flesh side near bottom of neck. Angle picks so they pass across and down, going through melon skin nearer bottom of neck. Push them all the way in. Countersink picks with end of another wooden pick. Cover holes with a small, thin, melon slice so the duck doesn't look like it's just been smooched by a vampire.

6. When setting top set of wings in place, be sure to put front end of largest wedge forward of hollow seed pocket. Tuck it right up against back of neck or it will fall in hole. Replace remainder of wings in usual manner.

SWAN
1. Follow general directions for melon duck.
2. Position swan’s neck/head pattern lengthwise on oval slice. If the pattern is too long for the slice, then position it so that some of the bottom will extend down and disappear when the cutting begins. After tracing, block cut all around design. Trim beak to a point at skin side and round off edges all along head and neck. Cutting the underside of the neck is tricky. Don't try it in one single pass. First cut into the flesh to the depth of the skin. Now go over the first pass cutting through the skin. Trying to do it all in one pass often results in a slip and . . . a headless swan.
3. Make 3 primary wing sections just like melon duck. Now cut small sets (3 wedges per set) into ribs between primary cavities. You may also cut a small set below each primary side cavity. This makes 3 large wings and 4 small wings. Stay organized.
4. The swan's head is attached to whichever end of melon is more blunt. Cut your 2 skewers down to 2, pointed, 4-inch lengths. Push skewers into front of thick part of neck (lower middle) quite near skin. Place 1 skewer 1 inch above other. Hold back of neck against front of melon so its head is nice and high, then tap skewers into melon with side of your large knife. Countersink skewers so they don't show and cover holes with a thin slice of melon.
5. Place wings in standard manner but be sure to have smallest wedge in top sets sticking up. Remember, this is done by cutting a small slit into second-to-smallest wedge and inserting 1 end of smallest wedge into slit.