

CANTALOUPE

Enticed by their delicious sweet flavor, many novice gardeners want to grow cantaloupes their first year in the garden. They quickly learn that they are one of the most demanding and difficult fruits to grow successfully. Timing, conditions, and weather all have to come together for just the right circumstances to succeed. Luckily, we have a few tricks up our sleeves to encourage these tasty treats to make our garden the envy of the neighborhood. True cantaloupes, muskmelons, and mixed late melons all fall into this family of fruits - and they are all delicious fresh from the garden.

SOIL PREPARATION

Cantaloupes prefer a sandy soil, rich in organic matter, well drained, and not too heavy. Like corn, they can handle a higher quantity of composted manure than other vegetables - they really like the heat generated by decomposing materials. They also need full sun exposure. Before planting, incorporate 2-3 inches of well composted organic matter and 1-2 lbs of all-purpose fertilizer (we recommend "That's All it Takes" complete fertilizer) per 100 square feet and work them into the soil to a depth of 4-6 inches. Heavy, clay-based soils must be amended with compost and organic matter to encourage and allow good root development. If you have clay soils, we recommend 4-6 inches of organic matter and 50 lbs of Utelite or Zeolite per 200 square feet added to the soil each fall for multiple years to increase drainage and nutrient availability. Over time, you can create a better growing environment for your garden plants to thrive in and produce. Please see our information sheet "Preparing your Soil" for more detailed info on soil preparation before planting a garden.

PLANTING

We have had success both from transplants or from seed when planting cantaloupes - but in both cases, it is best if you start by solarizing your soil with black or clear plastic mulch or weed barrier 2-3 weeks before you want to plant. If starting seeds indoors, choose a warm location for germination (at least 75 degrees) and use a light seed-starting soil. We start our seedlings 3 weeks before setting them outside, so for Cache Valley, the last week of April is perfect. Just after Mother's Day, cut holes into your plastic or weed barrier mulch at 4-6 foot intervals and then plant your seedlings the same depth as they are in their containers, and water them thoroughly with Kangaroots root stimulator. The Kangaroots will help prevent transplant shock and aid in establishing an extensive and strong root system quickly. If starting from seed directly in the garden, use the same spacing and planting time as for transplanting. Make a shallow depression in each cut (in the plastic mulch), place 4-6 seeds in each hole, and cover them with 1/4-1/2 inch of peat moss, light potting soil, or coconut coir, and tamp the soil down gently with your hand. Water with the Kangaroots, and cover the area with a hot cap, Wall-o-Water or Aquadome to help retain the heat and moisture. The seedlings should emerge in 7-14 days with adequate heat.

VARIETIES

When it comes to melons, everyone has an opinion on which is their very favorite; at Anderson's we are no different. Hands down, our favorite melon for flavor and quality is Roadside. This variety produces very large fruits with deep sutures and heavy netting mature around the first to middle of August. The texture is firm, the flavor is divine, and it holds its quality for many days before going soft.

Burpee's Ambrosia and Burpee Hybrid have been two of our favorites for many, many years - their flavor rivals that of Roadside, but they ripen very quickly, and become soft and mushy if not picked when ripe.

For early maturing (short seasons) we recommend Inspire, at it matures in about 70-75 days compared to 85 days for standard melons. Unique varieties we enjoy include Da Vinci, an Italian style melon with outstanding flavor and quality; Crenshaw, which looks like a cross between a cantaloupe and honey dew; and the good old standby Honeydew melon.



Burpee's Hybrid Cantaloupe

WATER

Cantaloupes require frequent watering during the year, usually about 1-2 inches per week in 2-3 applications. Use drip or soaker irrigation if possible, and mulch heavily around the plants with an organic mulch to help retain soil moisture and to prevent weed emergence. Cantaloupes have a shallow root system, so be careful when cultivating close to the plant, and during warm, dry weather, they are prone to dry out quickly. We can't stress enough the importance of using plastic mulch or weed barrier around the melons to prevent weeds, to heat up the soil, and to prevent damage from rapid drying and moisture loss. You will see a dramatic increase in your yields because of it. Consistently moist, but not soggy - that's your goal.

FERTILIZER

About 4-6 weeks after germination or transplant, usually about the time the vines start to run, apply a balanced vegetable food ("That's All it Takes" or Happy Frog Organic Tomato & Vegetable Food) around the base of the plants and water thoroughly. Use about 1/4 cup per hill. For some quick growth, especially around the time they start to flower and set fruit, use Ferti-lome Blooming and Rooting water soluble fertilizer or an organic alternative like Seedlinger's Fertilixer weekly to kick them into fruit production mode. Since melons are so difficult to cultivate, we always recommend an application of beneficial microbes and mycorrhizae (Kangaroos or Myke supplements) to help with their development. Your plants will be healthier, more vigorous, and produce fruits faster and for a much longer harvest.

CANTALOUPE	
PLANTING TIME	Group D
PLANTING METHOD	Mounds
MOUND SPACING	5-7'
SEED DEPTH	1/4"
TIME TO HARVEST	70-100 Days
WATER NEEDS	1", 3x weekly
TRANSPLANT/DIRECT SOW	Direct or Transplant
SPECIAL ISSUES	Powdery Mildew Cucumber Beetles, aphids, spider mites Verticillium and Fusarium virus

COMMON PROBLEMS

Not too many insects bother melon vines, but watch for cucumber beetles, aphids, and spider mites specifically. Mites can damage leaves quickly without notice, sapping vital strength from the plants, and severely limiting your fruit production. Ferti-lome Broad Spectrum insecticide or Triple Action Insecticide (Organic) will be your best options for controlling these pesky invaders. Powdery mildew is almost as destructive to the vines and their productivity. In late July (or earlier if the weather is hot and humid with cool nights) start spraying the vines with Natural Guard Copper soap to prevent mildew from ruining your crop in August and September. All it takes is a week or two of mildew to stop the vines from flowering and stop the fruit production. Use crop rotation and mycorrhizae to help prevent the vines from picking up Verticillium and Fusarium diseases that will quickly kill the vines just as they start to produce.

HARVEST

For cantaloupe and muskmelons, when the exterior of the fruit is well netted and tan, lift the fruit and twist; if the fruit separates easily from the vine, it is ready to eat. Regularly check the blossom end also, if it is slightly softer than the even firmness of the rest of the melon, it just might be ready to separate from the vine. Over-ripe melons just don't taste

good, so we like to get them right as they become ready. Mixed and later melons don't detach like cantaloupes do, so watch the underside of the melon to change color and the blossom ends to start to soften. They are more difficult to gauge their maturity. Harvest until frost kills the vine.

NOTES _____

