

## How to grow melons

### Cantaloupe (*Cucumis melo*)

### Watermelon (*Citrullus lanatus*)

Family: Cucurbitaceae (Cucurbits)

Season: Warm

Ease of growing: Moderate

Fertility needs: Medium

Water needs: Medium-high

Common propagation: Seed

### Seed facts

Germination temperatures: 65°F to 85°F

Germination time: 6 to 18 days

Viability: 3 years

Direct sow: late May to June

### Transplants

Weeks to grow transplant: 3 to 4

Start: late April to May

Plant out: late May to June

### Planning facts

Spacing: 18" to 24" in 6' rows

Plants per square foot: 0.5

Days to harvest: 85 to 100 from seed; 70 to 85 from transplants

## Variety selection

Melons are a diverse group that includes three major categories: muskmelons, honeydew melons and watermelons. Muskmelons and cantaloupes generally have netted or ribbed skins and orange flesh. Honeydews are closely related to muskmelons but have smooth skin and green flesh. Watermelons are a different species originating from tropical Africa with greater heat requirements and a longer growing season than muskmelons and honeydews.

## Preparation and planting

Melons require a lot of light to mature good quality fruit, so they are difficult to grow successfully in partly shaded gardens. Lighter textured soils high in organic matter are best for melons. In areas with short growing seasons, it is best to start melons, especially watermelon, in peat pots and transplant them into the garden. Plant seeds or transplants in hills or rows. If you set plants out early in soil warmed with plastic, be prepared to protect them with hot caps, plastic tents or other season extenders.

## Care

Melons are deep-rooted but need consistent moisture, especially early in their growth and during flowering and early fruiting. Avoid overhead irrigation late in the day to minimize foliar diseases. The amount of water needed lessens as the fruit ripens. Use mulch to retain moisture, control weeds and, in the case of dark mulches, warm soil. All melons respond well to the heat provided by black plastic mulch.

## Major pests

**Insects:** Mites and striped cucumber beetle.

**Diseases:** Bacterial wilt, Anthracnose, Phytophthora, gummy stem blight.

## Harvesting and storage

The best way to tell if a watermelon is ripe is to look at the tendril across from where the fruit is attached to the vine. If the tendril is dry and brown, the fruit is mature. Muskmelons are ready when the fruit pulls easily from the vine. However, honeydews are over-ripe at that point. All melons, except netted ones, should not be stored below 45°F. With proper storage, many varieties can last for two to four weeks.

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