



**CORNELL
COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION OF
ONEIDA COUNTY**

HOME GROWN FACTS

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GROWING MELONS



Also known as muskmelon, cantaloupe, honeydew melon

Heat-loving melons can be a challenge to grow in cooler regions of New York. To increase success, choose short-season varieties, start them inside, warm soil with black plastic or IRT mulch, and protect young plants with fabric row covers.

Site Characteristics

Sunlight:

- full sun

Soil conditions:

- requires high fertility

Prefers warm, well-drained, soil, high in organic matter with pH 6.5 to 7.5. Consistent, plentiful moisture needed until fruit is about the size of a tennis ball. Soil temperatures below 50 F slow growth. Consider using black plastic and fabric row covers to speed soil warming. Sandy or light-textured soils that warm quickly in spring are best.

Special locations:

- outdoor containers - Bush varieties can be grown in large containers on patios, decks, etc.

Plant Traits

Lifecycle: annual; Tender annual.

Ease-of-care: moderately difficult

In many areas of New York, successful crops require starting plants indoors, using plastic mulch to warm soil, and fabric row covers to protect young transplants.

Height: 1 to 1.5 feet

Spread: 3 to 12 feet

Foliage color: medium green

Foliage texture: coarse

Shape:

- low and trailing
- climbing / vine

Growing Information

How to plant:

Propagate by seed —Germination temperature: 60 F to 95 F

Days to emergence: 3 to 5 - In very warm (90 F) soil. About 10 days at 70 F.

Seed can be saved 4 years.

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Maintenance and care:

If you have long, hot growing seasons direct-seed into garden. To ensure ripening in areas with shorter growing seasons and cooler weather, choose fast-maturing varieties, start plants inside, use black or IRT plastic mulch to warm soil and use fabric row covers to protect plants.

Direct-seed 1 to 2 weeks after average last frost when soil is 70 F or warmer. Plant ½ inch deep, 6 seeds per hill, hills 4 to 6 feet apart; or 1 foot apart in rows 5 feet apart. Can plant at closer spacings if trellised. Thin to 2 to 3 plants per hill.

For transplanting, sow seeds indoors ¼ inch deep in peat pots (2-inch square or bigger), 2 to 4 weeks before setting out. Plants should have one or two true leaves when transplanted.

Transplant at same spacings as direct-seeded crops - 2 to 3 plants per hill in hills spaced 4 to 6 feet apart, or 1 to 2 feet apart in rows 5 feet apart. Transplants are delicate and roots are sensitive to disturbance. If you need to thin, use scissors. Keep soil intact around plant when transplanting.

Mulch plants after soil has warmed to help maintain consistent moisture and suppress weeds.

If using fabric row covers, remove at flowering to allow pollination by bees. Good pollination is critical to fruit set.

Plants require consistent moisture until pollination. Once fruits are about the size of a tennis ball, only water if soil is dry and leaves show signs of wilting.

To prevent insect damage to developing fruits, place melons on pots or pieces of wood.

If growing melons on a trellis, support fruit with slings made from netting, fabric, or pantyhose. Trellising improves air circulation around plants and can help reduce foliar disease problems. Choose small-fruited varieties and reduce plant spacing.

For large plantings, leave a strip of rye cover crop every second or third row perpendicular to prevailing winds to protect plants from damaging wind.

To reduce insect and disease problems, avoid planting cucumber family crops (melons, squash, pumpkins) in the same spot two years in a row.

Pests:

Striped or spotted cucumber beetles - Construct tents of fine netting or cheesecloth or use floating row cover over young plants. Put in place at planting and remove at flowering. Control beetles to prevent bacterial wilt.

Aphids - A hard stream of water can be used to remove aphids from plants. Wash off with water occasionally as needed early in the day. Check for evidence of natural enemies such as gray-brown or bloated parasitized aphids and the presence of alligator-like larvae of lady beetles and lacewings.

Squash vine borer - Cut open vines and remove by hand.

Squash bugs - Handpick. Bury or compost plant residues after harvest.

Flea beetles - Use row crop covers to help protect plants from early insect damage. Put in place at planting and remove at flowering. Control weeds.

Diseases:

Powdery mildew - Avoid crowding plants. Space apart to allow air circulation. Eliminate weeds around plants and garden to improve air circulation. In autumn rake and dispose of all diseased leaves and fruit.

Choose varieties resistant to powdery mildew.

Bacterial wilt - Remove and discard or destroy infested plants. Eliminate perennial weeds such as milk weed, marshcress and yellow rocket and avoid planting next to susceptible ornamentals.

Fusarium wilt - Locate new plants in part of garden different from the previous year's location. If that is not possible, remove infested soil and replace with fresh soil. Plant tolerant varieties such as Iroquois, Harper Hybrid, Saticoy, Pulsar or Athena.

Fungal leaf spot - Avoid wetting foliage if possible. Water early in the day so aboveground plant parts will dry as quickly as possible. Avoid crowding plants. Space apart to allow air circulation. Eliminate weeds around plants and garden area to improve air circulation. In autumn, rake and dispose of all diseased leaves or fruit. Verify diagnosis.

Cucumber mosaic virus - Remove and destroy infested plants. Eliminate perennial weeds such as milkweed, marshcress and yellow rocket and avoid planting next to susceptible ornamentals.

Scab - Avoid wetting foliage if possible. Water early in day so aboveground plant parts can dry as quickly as possible. Avoid crowding plants. Space apart to allow air circulation.

Varieties

Typical eastern muskmelons (*C. melo* v. *reticulatus*) have heavily netted fruits with large seed cavities and a musky aroma and flavor. They are sometimes mistakenly called cantaloupes, which belong to the group *C. melo* v. *Cantaloupensis* and are seldom grown in North America.

Another group of melons, sometimes referred to as winter melons (*C. melo* v. *indorus*), are difficult to grow in New York outside of Long Island because they require a long, hot growing season. These include honeydew, Persian, Crenshaw and casaba melons. A fourth group of this variable species is *C. melo* v. *conomon*, which includes the Chinese cucumber or Oriental pickly cucumber.

When choosing varieties, match days to harvest with the length of your growing season. (Keep in mind that you will plant well after the last frost date and want to make sure your crop ripens well before first frost in fall.) If you have a long enough season, choose varieties with different maturity dates to spread out your harvest, or stagger planting dates of a single variety.

Bush varieties have more compact vines, some just 3 feet long. Also base your variety choices on disease resistance, fruit size (stick with smaller fruits in short-season areas or if you plan to trellis the vines), flavor, and color.

Some varieties recommended for New York include:

Orange flesh: Ambrosia, Gold Star, Athena, Burpee Hybrid, Earliqueen, Fastbreak, Harper Hybrid, Iroquois, Pulsar, Superstar

Green flesh: Early Dew, Passport

Specialty: Charantais, Edonis, Galia

Heirloom: Eel River, Jenny Lind, Rocky Ford, Schoon's Hard shell

Source: <http://explore.cornell.edu>

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