

MUSKMELON

Muskmelons, also known as cantaloupe, are a tender warm weather vegetable that requires culture similar to that of cucumbers. As the name implies, a strong yet slightly musky odor is characteristic of melons in this group.



Muskmelons produce a sprawling vine that takes up a lot of room in a small backyard garden. Most traditional muskmelon varieties produce a pale yellow melon covered with a netted surface and have orange-colored flesh. Some newer muskmelon varieties have a light green flesh. Other melons such as honeydew, crenshaw, and casaba--often called winter melons--have cultural practices nearly identical to that of muskmelons.

Varieties

Large sutured or ribbed varieties include Burpee, Supermarket, Gold Star, Superstar, Pulsar, Dixie Jumbo, Legend, and Magnum 45. Harper is a non-sutured large-fruited type. Small, solid, nonsutured types--often referred to as Rocky Ford types-- include PMR-45 and Hiline. Ambrosia has an excellent flavor but is good only for a few days at ripening.

When to plant

Muskmelons are injured by light freezes; all danger of frost should be past before setting plants. Consistent soil temperatures of 58-60° F are necessary to encourage good germination. Early May is a standard planting date over most of Kansas.

Spacing

Muskmelon vines spread 6-8 feet wide, so, row spacings of 6 feet are necessary with individual plants spaced every 18 inches to 2 feet in the row.

Care

Muskmelons usually do not require heavily fertilized soil. Normal maintenance fertilizers should produce an adequate crop. Mulching with black plastic warms soil, improves early season growth, and makes weed control easier. Use a starter fertilizer if setting transplants. Dry weather as the melons approach maturity is important to maintain good vine vigor and sweet flavorful fruit. Like cucumbers, muskmelons produce separate male and female flowers and require bees to pollinate them. Male flowers are more abundant and are present 1-2 weeks before female flowers begin to develop. Muskmelons and cucumbers will not cross pollinate.

Harvesting

Melons are ready for harvest when the stem slips easily and cleanly away from the end of the melon, leaving a clean dish-shaped scar. Melons should be slightly soft and have a pleasant aroma. Honeydew, casaba, and crenshaw melons do not slip from the vine but do develop a slight softening at the flower end opposite the stem. Muskmelon fruit will not ripen off the vine. They can be stored for only 3-4 days when fully ripe.

Common concerns

Cucumber beetles (transmit bacterial wilt)

Aphids

Spider mites

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