

How to Grow Melons

General

Melon plants have sparse leaves and need a lot of sunshine and heat to mature their fruit. Their roots are delicate and require high nutrition and lots of water. For all that effort, you'll be rewarded by the ripest, sweetest melons you've ever tasted.

Latin

Cantaloupes (musk melons) & Honeydews: *Cucurbita melo*

Watermelons: *Citrullus lanatus*

Family: Cucurbitaceae

Difficulty

Easy in a greenhouse or cloche, or outdoors in long, warm summers. Difficult without these conditions.

Season & Zone

Season: Warm season

Exposure: Full-sun

Zone: 4-10

Timing

It is essential to start seeds indoors or in a greenhouse mid to late April. Transplant at the end of May or first week of June, when the plants are 5 weeks old. Optimal soil temperature for germination: 20-25°C (68-77°F). Seeds should sprout in 5-10 days.

Starting

Sow seeds 1cm (½") deep. Set transplants 60-90cm (24-36") apart in rows 1.5-2m (5-6') apart.

Growing

Ideal pH: 6.0-6.8. Choose a warm, well-drained soil. Add dolomite lime and compost or well-rotted manure to the bed and ½-1 cup of complete organic fertilizer beneath each transplant. Melons need really warm growing conditions. Use black plastic mulch, cloches, or floating row covers. Success may improve in raised beds. Melons plants require 8-10 weeks of good, hot growing weather from the middle of June to the end of August. During that time, a melon vine must grow 5-9 leaves before starting to flower, then set 4 or more male flowers before making its first female flower, and then ripen its fruit before cool, damp weather sets in. Melons do not ripen off the vine. During the entire growing season, make sure to provide ample water.

Harvest

Fruit will ripen in late August to early September. Ripe cantaloupe will easily detach from the vine when light finger pressure is applied to the stem. Watermelon is ripe when the tendril nearest to the fruit withers and dries up.

Companion Planting

Melons are great companions for corn, marigolds, nasturtiums, pumpkin, radish, squash, and sunflowers. Avoid planting near potatoes. Melon leaves are full of calcium, so they're good for the compost heap.



Melons

