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How to Grow Cantaloupe Plants: The Complete Guide



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FREE GUIDE!

Planting, Growing, and Harvesting Cantaloupes

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)

Last Updated: March 12, 2024



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A juicy slice of a ripe cantaloupe is what summer is all about! This heat-loving melon has a relatively long growing season, making it especially well-suited for southern gardeners. Here's how to grow and care for cantaloupes.

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About Cantaloupes

Cantaloupes are a type of melon with a tan-green rind. Typically, the rind is covered in a spiderweb-like pattern, though some varieties may also be striped. Inside, the flesh is

lar melons, such as watermelons and honeydew melons.

Cantaloupes vs. Muskmelons

Oddly enough, the melon that is commonly referred to as a “cantaloupe” in North America is not actually a true cantaloupe, which is more common in Europe. In fact, our “cantaloupes” are a type of **muskmelon**. (True cantaloupe has a rough, warty rind and is not widely grown or commercially available in the US and Canada.)

In North America, the names “muskmelon” and “cantaloupe” are used interchangeably, but we will refer to this fruit simply as “cantaloupe” on this page to avoid confusion!



Read Next

- [Growing Melons in the Garden](#)
- [5 Favorite Winter Squash Varieties for Cooking](#)
- [How to Save Vegetable Seeds](#)

PLANTING

Plant in a spot that gets full sun (6-8 hours of direct sunlight per day). To produce the best melons, the plants need all the light they can get. Plus, the afternoon sun will dry off leaves, reducing the risk of fungal diseases that comes with wet foliage.

Cantaloupes do best in well-draining soil that's a mix between loamy and sandy. (Growing the plants in raised rows—aka “hills”—ensures good drainage.) Amend soil with aged manure or compost before planting. Learn more about [soil amendments](#) and

Mulching the planting site with black plastic will serve multiple purposes: it will warm the soil ahead of planting, hinder weed growth, and keep developing fruits clean.

When to Plant Cantaloupes

- Cantaloupes may be started from seed or purchased as young plants from a nursery. In colder regions, starting with young plants is recommended, as it will give you a head start on the growing season.
- Starting from seed:
 - If you are in a colder region, start seeds indoors 4 to 6 weeks before your last spring frost date. Cantaloupe vines are very tender and should not be transplanted until all danger of frost has passed and soil temperatures remain above 60°F (16°C).
 - If you live in a warmer climate, you may direct sow seeds outdoors as soon as the soil temperature warms to at least 60°F (16°C).

How to Plant Cantaloupes

- Plant seeds 1 inch deep, 18 inches apart, in hills (or hilled rows) about 3 feet apart.
- If you have limited space, vines can be



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GROWING

- If a soil test indicates that nutrients are lacking, fertilize with a standard liquid fertilizer when vines start growing and spreading. Later on, avoid nitrogen-heavy fertilizers, as too much nitrogen can result in lots of foliage and less fruit.
- Row covers are a good way to keep

- Watering is key. While the plants are growing, blooming, and setting fruit, they need about 2 inches per square foot of water (about 1.5 gallons) per week.
 - Water in the morning, and try to avoid wetting the leaves, as wet foliage encourages fungal and other diseases.
 - If possible, use drip irrigation to keep plants consistently and evenly watered.
 - Mulching around the plants can help to retain moisture.
 - Reduce watering once fruits are growing. Hot, dry weather produces the sweetest melons.
 - If you've had an exceptional amount of rainfall during the ripening stage, this can cause bland fruit.
- Once fruit begins to grow, prune end buds off vines. Your plants may produce fewer melons, but they will be larger and of better quality.
- Vines produce male and female flowers separately on the same plant. They often begin producing male flowers several weeks before the females appear. (Don't be discouraged when the first blooms do not produce fruit.)
 - As with other cucurbits, melon flowers

(squash flowers are shown as an example, but the principle is the same for melons).

- If your muskmelons taste bland, the trouble could be a lack of magnesium in sandy soil. Sweeten the fruit by spraying the vines with this solution: Dissolve 6 1/2 tablespoons of Epsom salts and 3 1/3 tablespoons of borax in 5 gallons of water. Spray the foliage when the vines begin to “run” and again when the fruit is about two inches in diameter.

Types

- **‘Ambrosia’** — 85 days to maturity. Among the sweetest varieties.
- **‘Athena’** — 70-80 days to maturity. Early variety that produces large, 5-6 pound fruits.
- **‘Hale’s Best Jumbo’** — 80-90 days to maturity. Produces 3-pound, aromatic melons.
- **‘Minnesota Midget’** — 70-80 days to maturity. Early variety well-suited for gardens in colder regions. Produces 1-pound, sweetly flavored melons.
- **‘Bush Star’** — 90 days to maturity. Bush variety suits gardeners with limited space.

HARVESTING

How and When to Harvest Cantaloupes

- When rinds begin to change from green to tan or yellow, the melon is typically ripe enough to pick. Be careful not to pick too early, however.
- Look for a crack in the stem where it attaches to the fruit. This is a sign of ripeness as well. The fruit should be easy to separate from the vine, but if they fall off by themselves, they are usually overripe.
- Harvest melon when vines are dry, and be careful not to damage them.
- Melons will soften after harvesting, but will not continue to sweeten off the vine.
- Cantaloupe can be stored uncut for 5 or 6 days. If cut, they can last in the refrigerator for about 3 days, wrapped tightly in plastic.

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PESTS/DISEASES

Cantaloupe Pests and Diseases

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
Aphids	Insect	Misshapen/yellow leaves; distorted flowers; leaf drop; sticky “honeydew” (excretion) on leaves; sooty, black mold	Knock off with water spray; apply insecticidal soap; inspect new plants carefully; use slow-release fertilizers; avoid excess nitrogen; encourage aphid pests such as lacewings, ladybugs, spiders
Cucumber beetles	Insect	Holes in leaves/flowers; ripened fruit; plants	Handpick; mulch heavily; use row covers; destroy

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
		signs: wilting; plants die; ends of cut stems, when pressed together for 10 seconds and pulled apart, release stringy, white sap)	
<u>Cucumber mosaic virus</u>	Virus	Stunting; mottled green/yellow/white pattern or ringed spots on leaves/fruit; distorted leaf growth; warts on fruit	Destroy infected plants; choose resistant varieties and certified virus-free seed; use row covers; disinfect tools; weed; control aphids; use mulch
Fusarium wilt	Fungus	Plants wilt (sometimes on just one side) in daytime; leaves turn yellow (lower ones first); later, entire plant wilts/dies; stunting; stem cross section reveals brown discoloration	Destroy infected plants; avoid excessive nitrogen; in acidic soils, raise pH to 7.0; choose resistant varieties; disinfect tools; rotate crops
<u>Powdery mildew</u>	Fungus	Typically, white spots on upper leaf surfaces expand to flour-like	Destroy infected leaves or plants; choose resistant varieties; plant in

Pest/Disease	Type	Symptoms	Control/Prevention
		distortion/stunting of leaves/flowers	plants with 1 tea-spoon baking soda dissolved in 1 quart water; de-destroy crop residue
<u>Squash vine borers (moth & larvae)</u>	Insect	Large, wrinkled larvae become orange-red/black, wasp-like, daytime moths; larvae bore into vines; vines wilt suddenly; plants die; mushy area and/or green to orange-yellow, sawdust-like excrement on/near base of plant stem	If detected early, slit infested stem lengthwise halfway to remove borer(s), then bury the cut in moist soil to encourage rooting; wrap seedling stems in aluminum foil collar; catch moths with yellow sticky traps; use row covers if no pests previously, but uncover before flowering; destroy crop residue; rotate crops

WIT AND WISDOM

- Cantaloupe was named for Cantalupo, a former papal villa near Rome.

RECIPES

GRILLED CANTALOUPE WITH PROSCIUTTO

FRUIT

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine Boeckmann

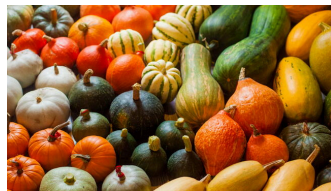


Catherine Boeckmann loves nature, stargazing, and gardening so it's not surprising that she and The Old Farmer's Almanac found each other. She leads digital content for the Almanac website, and is also a certified master gardener in the state of Indiana. [Read More from Catherine Boeckmann](#)

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COMMENTS

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Linda Bragg (not verified) 1 year 8 months ago

Are the blossoms edible ?? Thank you :)

[REPLY](#)

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Kim (not verified) 2 years 10 months ago

Hi there!

I followed Ben's advice to dig in raw kitchen compost and now I have 30+ Cantaloupe seedlings growing! Its awesome. I've transplanted a handful of healthy looking plants and some of the others look like they have rust on the first leaves... (cotydons?).

What is this and what should I do about it?

Thanks!!

Kim

[REPLY](#)

Alex (not verified) 2 years 7 months ago

Love to know how this turned out for you.

.. . . .

off my fence. Didn't gave the rust: did that
persist?

REPLY

The Editors 2 years 10 months ago

It's hard to know what it could be without
seeing a picture, but if seedlings look dis-
eased or otherwise weak, you're better off
just getting rid of them (in the trash, not
compost)—especially given that you had
so many appear!

REPLY

Dorothy (not verified) 3 years 9 months ago

Planted in June -

Both vines with many flowers and leaves but no
fruit — I'm sad!

What to do? Thank you—

REPLY

Denise (not verified) 1 year 11 months
ago

much nitrogen potash and or better ne
meal for phosphorus melon love phos-
phorus I put banana peels in a plastic
drinking bottle cut the bottom out but in
upside down and water through the bot-
tle where you cut it off I also add cinna-
mon in the mix for fungus. Hope this
helps. Buy a soil tester .

REPLY

Anne (not verified) 2 years 11 months
ago

Maybe the flower-blossoms are not get-
ting "fertilized due to lack of insects";
there are ways to Pollinate flowers;; I've
read;

REPLY

The Editors 3 years 8 months ago

No easy answer here, Dorothy, so we
went to the cooperative extension for
their thinking: High temperatures or high
fertility can cause the cantaloupe to pro-
duce only male blooms which results in
poor fruit set. Nematodes can also cause

[REPLY](#)

S lamony (not verified) 4 years 9 months ago

All good info but lacks day to maturity , which would be very helpful in northern areas.

[REPLY](#)

Riley (not verified) 3 years ago

Southern areas 80 days as stated, I believe; cooler climate will take longer to grow/bloom if at all due to them needing ample sun rays and heat. hope that helped.

[REPLY](#)[MORE COMMENTS](#)

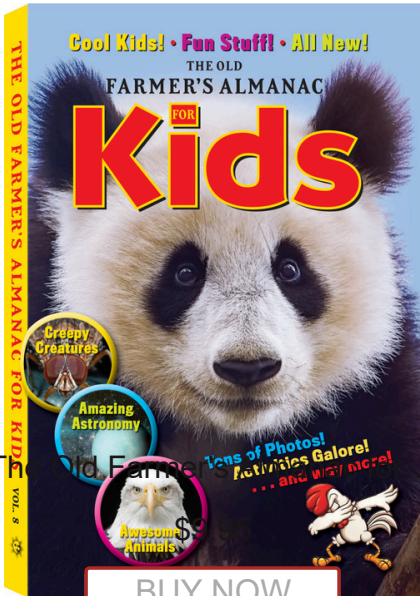
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