

GARDENING WITH CANTALOUPE

Cantaloupes (muskmelons) are a refreshing and sweet way to enjoy a summer garden. This guide will give you what you need to know to help you grow your own cantaloupes from seed to harvest.

WHEN TO GROW

- Cantaloupes are a heat loving fruit and need warm, fertile soil to grow and taste their best.
- They should be planted after the last frost of the year. In North Carolina, this is usually around early to mid May with harvesting happening in mid July through August.

WHERE TO PLANT

- Cantaloupe, and similar plants like honeydew, are vines so they need lots of room to grow and plenty of sun.
- If you have a designated garden bed, you can plant as usual and let the vine run out of the bed onto the ground.
- If not, its okay! Just find a nice sunny spot where they have plenty of room to grow.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Seeds: can be purchased at gardening stores or online.
- Compost or other nutrient rich soil. These can be found at any gardening store as well some hardware stores.
- Mulch, such as pine-straw or hay.
- Water.

CANTALOUPE VS. MUSKMELON

What we normally call cantaloupe is actually a type of muskmelon. Although true cantaloupes are also a type of muskmelon, they are a little different from what we know. They come from Europe and have a smooth surface, green skin, and are not sweet as the muskmelons we are used to. While they are both muskmelons, only the European version is a true cantaloupe.

Muskmelon



True Cantaloupe





Art made from a cantaloupe

HOW TO PLANT

Cantaloupes need a lot of nutrients (plant food!) to make them sweet and tasty, so if you don't have designated garden, preparing the ground they grow in is very important.

1. Once you have found your spot, dig several holes 3 to 4 feet apart. Each hole should be about 6 inches deep and about 12-18 inches wide.
2. Mix in your compost or nutrient rich soil with the soil you dug out then fill in the hole above the edge so that it makes a hill several inches high.
3. Plant a seed in each hill. Water to keep soil moist.
4. Once the cantaloupes have sprouted and are a few inches high, use mulch in a wide area around the plant. This helps to stop weeds from growing and also helps to keep the vine healthy!

Ripe Cantaloupe



Unripe Canteloupe



CARING FOR YOUR CANTALOUPE

- Watering is the most important thing you can control and they need a lot of it to help them grow and taste sweet. Water often enough so that the soil stays moist, but not waterlogged. Don't worry if the plants seem wilted in the midday sun, this is totally normal! Just make sure to **water in the morning or early evening** so that it does not evaporate during the day time heat.
- Once young fruits have formed, **get them off the ground** by using a small pot, mulch, a wooden board, or an old coffee can. This helps to prevent the fruit from rotting. If you're afraid of critters, a small crate can be placed over them as well.
- Eventually, the first fruits will become larger and new ones will begin to form. For best flavor, remove any new fruits until the larger ones can be harvested. This makes sure that all the nutrients go towards the larger fruits making them sweet and tasty!

HARVESTING AND STORAGE

- Cantaloupes are ready to be harvested when they are well netted (white raised ridges) and pale yellow or tan in color. To check, **gently** try to pull the fruit from the vine. If it comes off the vine easily, it is ready. If not, it will need some more time to ripen.
- For best flavor, eat immediately.
- If this is not possible the whole fruit can be stored at room temperature for 5-7 days.
- Cut up cantaloupe can be stored in the fridge for 3-4 days.