



Nature & Nurture Seeds' Guide to Growing & Using Melons & Watermelons

Can you imagine a world without the sweet, juicy, late-summer reminiscent fruits of your childhood? There are 2 main types of melons: "**Muskmelons**" and "**Watermelons**." Although folks may confuse them, they are quite distinct and are actually two different species! That's why we've divided this resource into two sections, one covering Muskmelons, and the other Watermelons.

Muskmelons include cantaloupe and honeydew types and range in flavor from mild and sugary to fruity and aromatic! Watermelons come in various shades of pink, orange, to yellow and are known for their sweet, mild yet hydrating flavor which are perfect for a hot summer's day. Industrial agriculture melons pale in flavor and texture compared to heirloom melons - fortunately **you can experience the full eating experience that melons have to offer by [growing your own!](#)**

Why Grow Melons?

- They're delicious!
- They're nutritious!
- They're refreshing ~ a perfect late-summer snack!

Growing Muskmelons & Watermelons

General Growing Instructions

1. All melons are frost sensitive and need warm days to grow, thrive, and ripen.
2. **Light:**
 - Melons need bright light to grow and thrive. Outdoors they need to be planted in a full sun location (at least 8 hours of direct sunlight per day).
 - If you plan to start seeds indoors be sure to provide them with a high quality light source such as T5 fluorescent or High Pressure Sodium. Ideally, provide 16 hours of light per day (use a timer). If you use a light fixture, be sure to follow the instructions regarding the minimum distance between plants and light bulbs because too close will burn plants. Provide air circulation with a small oscillating fan set to low blowing air between your plants and the light.

Muskmelons

Cucumis melo – includes cantaloupes, honeydews, etc.

Growing Muskmelons

1. **Starting seeds:** you can start seeds indoors or outdoors.

a) Starting seeds indoors:

- o If you are going to start Muskmelon seeds inside, be sure to use a high quality light source (see General Growing Instructions for Muskmelons and Watermelons above).
- o Start seeds indoors around 5/1. Sow seeds in 3" biodegradable pots into a good seed starting mix – we recommend Vermont Compost's Fort Lite mix. (the reason to use biodegradable pots is that melons don't like their roots disturbed during planting)
- o Ideal temperature for germination: 85-95° (use a heating mat).
- o Melon seedlings are sensitive to damping off fungus so keep seeds on the drier side and use a fan (set to low) to provide good air circulation.
- o Days to germination: 4-5.
- o After germination (once 2 leaves appear) grow plants at 72°.
- o Do not let plant become pot-bound in their pots.
- o **Prepare Plants For Planting (aka "Hardening Off")**
 - Begin to harden-off plants around May 25th
 - Be sure to Harden-Off your plants before planting them outside. This process takes at least 1 week and is necessary to acclimate your "wimpy" indoor-grown seedlings for new outdoor conditions (wind, strong sunlight, and temperature fluctuations)
 - To harden-off plants:
 - Start by placing your plants outside in a sunny location for 2 hours then put them back under the indoor lights. Each day, increase the amount of time (by 1.5 hours) that the plants spend in the sun until they spend all day and night outside.
 - Alternatively, place plants outdoors in a protected (non-windy) location where they will receive only 2 hours of morning sunlight and be in the shade for the rest of the day. Bring them in at night for the first few nights. Each day, place your plants in a location that will receive more sunlight and wind so that in 7 days they will be spending all day and night outside (this can be accomplished by locating them farther and farther away from the source of shade/wind protection)
 - Transplant them outdoors (around 6/1); plant pot & all – do not disturb roots.

b) Direct sow seeds outdoors:

- o direct sow seeds outdoors (1/2" deep) around 6/1, keeping seeds moist until germination.
- 2. **Soil:** Melons want lots of organic matter (compost and/or decomposed manure). They prefer well-drained soil.
- 3. **Light:** Plant melons in full sun.
- 4. **Spacing:** Melons tend to take up quite a lot of space; we'd recommend planting at least 3 feet apart.
- 5. **Water:** Water plants regularly (we recommend drip irrigation/soaker hoses).
- 6. **Pests:**
 - a. Protect outdoor germinating seeds from slugs (use phosphate based organic slug bait).
 - b. Protect plants from cucumber beetles by covering seeds/seedlings with row cover fabric at planting.
 - c. Protect plants from groundhogs and deer with repellants or fencing.
 - d. Protect ripening melons from raccoons

Watermelons

Citrullus lanatus

Growing Watermelons

1. **General Info:** Watermelons are heat loving plants and must be planted outdoors after summer weather has settled in (early June).
2. **Starting seeds:** you can start seeds indoors or outdoors (but will likely have better results starting seed indoors if you follow these instructions)
 - a) **Indoors:**
 - o If you are going to start Muskmelon seeds inside, be sure to use a high quality light source (see General Growing Instructions for Muskmelons and Watermelons above).
 - o Start seeds indoors around 5/7. Sow seeds in 3" biodegradable pots into a good seed starting mix – we recommend Vermont Compost's Fort Lite mix. (the reason to use biodegradable pots is that melons don't like their roots disturbed during planting)

- o Ideal temperature for germination: 85-95° (use a heating mat).
- o Watermelon seedlings are sensitive to damping off fungus so keep soil lightly moist but not too wet and use an oscillating fan (set to low) to provide good air circulation.
- o Days to germination: 4-5. Once 2 leaves appear, grow plants at a cooler temperature (around 72°).
- o Do not let plants become pot-bound in their pots.
- o **Prepare Plants For Planting (aka “Hardening Off”)**
 - Begin to harden-off plants around early June.
 - Be sure to Harden-Off your plants before planting them outside. This process takes at least 1 week and is necessary to acclimate your “wimpy” indoor-grown seedlings for new outdoor conditions (wind, strong sunlight, and temperature fluctuations)
 - To harden-off plants:
 - o Start by placing your plants outside in a sunny location for 2 hours then put them back under the indoor lights. Each day, increase the amount of time (by 1.5 hours) that the plants spend in the sun until they spend all day and night outside.
 - o Alternatively, place plants outdoors in a protected (non-windy) location where they will receive only 2 hours of morning sunlight and be in the shade for the rest of the day. Bring them in at night for the first few nights. Each day, place your plants in a location that will receive more sunlight and wind so that in 7 days they will be spending all day and night outside (this can be accomplished by locating them farther and farther away from the source of shade/wind protection)
 - Transplant them outdoors (in early June); plant pot & all – do not disturb roots.

b) Direct sow outdoors:

- o Direct sow seeds outdoors once warm summer weather has arrived (minimum soil temp of 65° in early June).
- o Keep seeds moist until germination.

3. **Soil:** Melons want lots of organic matter (compost and/or decomposed manure). They prefer well-drained soil.
4. **Light:** Plant melons in full sun.
5. **Spacing:** Watermelons are very large, vining plants and need lots of room to sprawl. Although it depends on the variety of watermelon, as a general guideline, we’d recommend planting your seeds at least 4-6 feet apart depending on the variety.
6. **Water:** Water plants regularly (we recommend drip irrigation/soaker hoses).

7. Pests:

- a. Protect outdoor germinating seeds from slugs (use phosphate based organic slug bait).
 - b. Protect plants from cucumber beetles by covering seeds/seedlings with row cover fabric at planting.
 - c. Protect plants from groundhogs and deer with repellents or fencing
 - d. Protect ripening melons from raccoons
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Harvesting Melons:

How do you know when they are ripe?

- While muskmelons and watermelons will ripen somewhat off the vine they will develop their full flavor when fully ripened on the vine.
- **Muskmelons:** harvest cantaloupes when fruit turn from green to orange and are easily removed from the plant.
- **Watermelons:** Check for 3 signs of watermelon ripeness 1) when spot on the bottom of fruit begins to turn from white to yellow 2) the tendril near main stem has turned brown 3) fruit has a hollow sound when knocked or flicked. Do not let fruit over-ripen on the vine.

Happy Growing!

