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The Spruce / Heidi Kolsky

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The North American cantaloupe (*Cucumis melo* var. *reticulatus*) is a vining [melon plant](#) that's easily recognized by the beige netted pattern that forms on the outside of the fruit. It has a tan-green rind and sweet orange flesh. Coarse, medium green heart-shape leaves sit upright on fuzzy stems that line prickly, sprawling vines. Cantaloupe loves warm weather in which to grow, and it has a moderate growth rate. It's typically planted in the spring for a summer harvest.

Common Name	Cantaloupe, muskmelon
Botanical Name	<i>Cucumis. melo</i> var. <i>reticulatus</i>
Family	Cucurbitaceae
Plant Type	Fruit, annual
Size	15-18 in. tall, 6 ft. wide
Sun Exposure	Full sun
Soil Type	Loamy, sandy, well-drained
Soil pH	Acidic, neutral
Bloom Time	Summer
Hardiness Zones	5-11 (USDA)
Native Area	Asia, Africa

How to Plant Cantaloupe



sun and nutrient-rich, acidic to neutral soil with good drainage.

Adding compost to the soil will help increase the nutrients for young plants to become established.

When to Plant

In cold climates, it's best to start seeds indoors approximately four to six weeks prior to your projected last spring frost date. Then, transplant seedlings outdoors once the soil temperature is above 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Likewise, if you live in a warm climate, you can simply plant seeds outdoors once the soil is above 60 degrees Fahrenheit.

Selecting a Planting Site

Choose a sunny spot with well-drained soil for your cantaloupe. Container growth is an option, though you must have a fairly large container. Avoid growing cantaloupe near watermelon, as they can attract the same pests and diseases.

Spacing, Depth, and Support

Seeds should be planted roughly an inch deep. Space them 18 inches apart in rows that are around 3 feet apart. A support structure isn't essential. But you can train the vines to grow up a sturdy trellis or other structure. Not only will this save some ground space, but it also will offer some protection from pests and diseases in the soil.

Cantaloupe Plant Care

Light

Cantaloupe needs full sun for healthy growth, meaning at least six hours of direct sun on most days. Sufficient sun also will help to keep the foliage dry, minimizing the chance of fungal diseases.



Ideal soil for cantaloupe is a mix of loamy and sandy with a slightly acidic to neutral soil pH. It should have sharp drainage. Consider amending the soil with compost prior to planting to improve both its drainage and nutrient content.

Water

Ensuring that your cantaloupe plant gets the right amount of [water at the right time](#) is one of the most important things for a healthy crop. While the plants are growing, blooming, and setting fruit, they need roughly 2 gallons of water per week. Watering in the morning is preferred to allow leaves to dry off in the afternoon. As the fruit grows, taper the watering. Hot, dry conditions in the final stages of maturation produce the sweetest melons.

Temperature and Humidity

Temperatures consistently ranging from 70 to 90 degrees Fahrenheit during the growing season will produce the best harvest. The cantaloupe plant isn't frost-tolerant. Plus, temperatures exceeding 90 degrees Fahrenheit can cause flower drop and a poor fruit harvest.

Furthermore, cantaloupe plants prefer higher humidity in their initial growth phase before lowering slightly to around 60 to 70 percent during the flowering and fruit development stages.

Fertilizer

Feeding is not recommended until a soil test is performed. Excessive nitrogen in the soil can promote foliage growth rather than good fruit production. If you have nutrient-poor soil, adding composted manure when planting and then a balanced organic fertilizer (such as [a fish emulsion](#)) every few weeks is common practice. For the amount to use, follow the product label instructions.



animals, as well as the wind, help to pollinate them. However, if your vines aren't fruiting, you always can try hand-pollinating. Remove a male blossom (the ones with the thin stems), take off the petals to reveal the stamen, and then shake the stamen into a female flower to coat it with pollen. Repeat this throughout the vines.



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Types of Cantaloupe

There are several cultivars of cantaloupe available, including:

- 'Athena': This variety takes between 70 and 80 days to mature on average and produces large fruits.
- 'Ambrosia': This variety is known for its especially sweet flavor.



Cantaloupe vs. Muskmelon

What people in North America typically refer to as a cantaloupe (*Cucumis melo* var. *reticulatus*) is actually a type of muskmelon (*Cucumis melo*). True cantaloupes are the European muskmelon variety (*Cucumis melo* var. *cantalupensis*), which has rough gray-green skin with ribbing. Besides differing in appearance, the European variety tends to be sweeter than the North American variety.

Harvesting Cantaloupe

Harvest time differs by cantaloupe variety, so be aware of the growth requirements for your particular plant. There are a few key signs that the fruits are ready for harvesting. First, the outside will turn from green to tan. There also should be a crack in the stem where it attaches to the fruit, and the fruit should easily twist off the vine. Fruit that falls off the vine on its own is typically overripe while fruit that's difficult to remove likely needs more time to ripen.

Gently twist the ripe fruit off of the stem to harvest. Be careful not to disturb the rest of the vine where fruits are still developing. You can store uncut fruits at room temperature for about a week. Cut fruit should be stored in the refrigerator, where it will be at its best for a few days.

How to Grow Cantaloupe in Pots

It's best to grow cantaloupe in the ground where it has ample space. But container growth also is an option if you don't have a suitable garden site.

Opt for a smaller cantaloupe variety, which will do better in limited



[trellis](#) or other support to the container, so the vines can grow upward instead of sprawling on the ground.

Pruning

Once fruit production starts, prune off the buds on the ends of the vines. This does mean sacrificing some blossoms that likely would have turned to fruits. However, it should end up making the remaining melons larger and of better quality.

Propagating Cantaloupe

Cantaloupe is typically grown from seeds or nursery plants. And it is possible to propagate your plants by [saving seeds](#). Not only is this an inexpensive way to create new plants, but it also allows you to propagate a particular variety that you like. Just make sure your cantaloupe wasn't planted near other melon species that it can cross-pollinate with, or your seeds might not grow true. You'll save seeds as you harvest your ripe cantaloupes. Here's how:

- 01 Wait until the cantaloupe is fully mature, and then twist it off the vine to harvest.
- 02 Cut the melon in half, and scoop out the seeds into a strainer.
- 03 Rinse off the pulp from the seeds.
- 04 Spread the seeds in a single layer on a paper towel or screen to dry for about a week.
- 05 Store dried seeds in a labeled envelope in a cool, dark, dry spot. They should be viable for a few years.

How to Grow Cantaloupe From Seed

If you'll be starting seeds indoors, plant them in a tray filled with



germination in about one to two weeks.

Potting and Repotting

Use a well-draining organic potting mix that contains perlite or vermiculite for growing cantaloupe in containers. Mixing some compost into the soil also can be a good idea to give your plants a boost. Repotting shouldn't be necessary. It's best to pot cantaloupe in a container that can accommodate its mature size to avoid disturbing the roots and vines.

Overwintering

Cantaloupe is an annual, completing its growth cycle in one season. It cannot survive cool winter temperatures. Thus, no overwintering maintenance is necessary.

Common Pests and Plant Diseases

Cantaloupe is susceptible to some common garden pests and diseases. Pests include [aphids](#), squash vine borer moths, and cucumber beetles. Diseases include powdery mildew and fusarium wilt. Insect infestations can sometimes be treated with neem oil or an organic insecticide. And diseases are best prevented with proper growing conditions.

FAQ

Is cantaloupe easy to grow?

Cantaloupe is fairly easy to grow as long as you're in the warm climate that the plant prefers and you provide sufficient water. You also must have adequate garden space for the long vines.



harvesting on average. Some varieties mature early and are ideal for cooler climates with shorter growing seasons.

Does cantaloupe come back every year?

Cantaloupe is an annual with the vines dying once fruit production is complete. So you'll have to start with new seeds or seedlings each year.

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