

Cantaloupe

Grow

A big fruit from one little seed

A cantaloupe is a round or oval fruit that grows on vines that ramble on the ground. Cantaloupes grow in a wide range of soil types. Loamy soil offers the greatest yield. Row widths should be 5-6 feet and in-row spacing should be 18-24 inches. Rows should be raised 6-8 inches to facilitate soil drainage.

Seeds should be planted when the danger of frost has passed, usually in April to May. Cantaloupes take 3-4 months to grow until they are mature enough to be picked. They turn beige and slip from the vine when ripe. Cantaloupes can be available year round. The peak harvest in the United States is late summer (mid-June to early September). In North Carolina, peak harvest is July to August. From each vine, melons are harvested over a two week period.¹⁻⁴

Fun Fact: The cantaloupe was first introduced to North America by Christopher Columbus on his second voyage to the New World.⁴

Choose

Use your senses to determine ripeness

The cantaloupe should be well formed. The stem should be missing, leaving a shallow depression. The surface should be covered with raised netting. Do not choose bruised or mushy cantaloupes or melons that are green, soft or have deep cracks in the rind. Cantaloupes that feel heavier and fuller are more ripe. Tap on the cantaloupe and listen to the sound it makes. If the sound is dull and deep, it is an indication that the cantaloupe is ripe. If the sound is high and hollow, the fruit is probably not yet ripe. Smell the cantaloupe. If it smells musky but not overly strong, the fruit is probably at its peak ripeness and should be eaten in the next day or so.⁴

Fun Fact: The cantaloupe is named for the papal gardens of Cantalupo, Italy, where some historians say this species of melon was first grown. Cantaloupe is native to Persia.^{1,5}



Store

Cantaloupes are often shipped firm and may need a few days at room temperature to soften. Cantaloupes do not continue to ripen once they are removed from the vine. But picked melons do become softer and juicier. Store unripe cantaloupe at room temperature 3 or 4 days until softer. If cantaloupe is picked or purchased ripe, it can be eaten right away or stored in the refrigerator (32-36°F, 85-95% relative humidity). Use as soon as possible.

Cantaloupe produces ethylene gas. Store away from lettuce and other ethylene-sensitive fruits and vegetables. Also, store cut cantaloupe away from other foods to avoid odor transfer.⁴⁻⁶

Fun Fact: Cantaloupe is called rock melon in Australia.³

Use

Cantaloupe is refreshing on its own. It can also be added to salads, smoothies and other recipes. Before cutting into a melon, be sure to wash the outside very well with clean, running water. The outside layer can have bacteria that you do not want to transfer to the fruit. When cutting, slice the cantaloupe in half first. Scoop out the seeds from the middle of each half. The cantaloupe can be further sliced into wedges or the flesh can be scooped out to use. Refrigerate cut cantaloupe until ready to serve.⁴⁻⁶

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Teach

Cantaloupes are a member of the *Cucurbitaceae* family, which include gourds, squash, pumpkins, watermelons, and cucumbers. Most varieties of cantaloupe grow well in the North Carolina climate. The most common are Allstar, Ambrosia, Athena, Durango, Eastern Star, Gold Star, Primo, Summet, Supermarket, and Tasty Sweet.¹⁻⁴

Fun Fact: Cantaloupe is the most popular melon in the United States.¹⁻⁴

Class Activity - Melon Measurements

Materials Needed:

- Variety of washed, whole melons - cantaloupe, sprite, watermelon, etc.
- Flexible measuring tape, scale
- Large plate or bowl to place melon on for weighing
- Cutting board, knife, and spoon or scoop
- Bowl or cup to place melon seeds
- Labels and pens to identify seed containers

Steps: **Use food safety steps. Wash hands and produce.*

Have students complete the following:

1. Estimate the weight of each melon variety. Measure weight and record.
2. Estimate the circumference, surface area and volume of each variety. Measure and record.
3. Compare the weight and size measurements for each variety.
4. Determine if there is a correlation between weight and size. Why or why not?
5. Determine the edible portion of each melon variety and weigh, if possible.
6. Compare the ratio of fruit to rind for each melon.
7. Estimate and record number of seeds in each variety.
8. Determine which variety has the greatest number of seeds.⁷

Fun Fact: A cantaloupe is a muskmelon. Muskmelons are actually a family of melon that includes cantaloupe, honeydew and casaba melon. Cantaloupe is the most popular muskmelon.^{1,3}

Eat

One cup of diced cantaloupe has about 50 calories. It is free of cholesterol and low in fat and sodium. Cantaloupe is an excellent source of vitamin C and a good source of vitamin A. One cup has about 95% of the Daily Value of vitamin C and almost 18% of the Daily Value of vitamin A. It is also a source of folate, lutein and zeaxanthin.

Vitamin A promotes normal vision, supports the growth and health of cells and tissue, protects us from infection, and helps regulate the immune system. Vitamin C helps form collagen to hold muscles, bones and tissues together, protects us from infections and bruising, aids in healing, keeps our gums healthy, helps our body absorb iron and folate from plants, and acts as an antioxidant to prevent cell damage. Our body needs folate for blood cell, DNA and genetic development. Phytochemicals act as antioxidants preventing or repairing cell damage. Beta-carotene, lutein and zeaxanthin are carotenoids. Beta-carotene can bolster antioxidant defenses in cells and help neutralize free radicals that may damage cells. Lutein and zeaxanthin may help maintain normal vision.^{5,7}

Fun Fact: Melon plants may produce male and female flowers. To produce fruit, even perfect, or female, flowers need bees for adequate pollination.³

Find

For more cantaloupe info and resources, visit:

1. North Carolina State Extension, www.ces.ncsu.edu
2. Oregon State University, <http://horticulture.oregonstate.edu>
3. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, School Nutrition, <https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/programs/fresh-fruit-vegetable>
4. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, www.fns.usda.gov
5. Produce for Better Health Foundation, <https://fruitsandveggies.org>
6. Eastern Cantaloupe Growers Association, www.ecga-usa.org
7. California Harvest of the Month, <http://harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov>
8. USDA Food Composition Databases, <http://ndb.nal.usda.gov>
9. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, www.eatright.org