Melons
Larry Sagers
Utah State University
Horticulture Specialist
Thanksgiving Point
Imagine…

• The tastiest of all foods
• Sweet and juicy
• Wonderful aroma and taste
• Melt in your mouth texture
• Best of all, you could grow it in your own garden

What fits this description?
Melons...of course!

- Many different varieties...
Melons
Homegrown Melons

• Only home-grown melons qualify for the honor of the best
• Not the tasteless, colored fruits that are picked hard and green and shipped hundreds of miles to sit on a store shelf until you take it home
• I am talking about melons picked at the peak of flavor and taken a few short steps to waiting recipients who anticipate their magnificent flavors
Melons + Heat = Delicious!

- Melons love heat!
- When other plants are “wimping out”, melons thrive
- Warm days and cool nights are the perfect prescription for delightful treats
Melons...the Sagers Way

• The following is the “Sagers Family Method” of growing melons
• If you have never grown good melons in your own garden, follow these suggestions for tasty treats from your garden
Step 1 – Choosing Variety

• Start with the right variety
• Growing up, I tried in vain to get melons to ripen
  - The only seed sold locally came from warm season areas
Step 1 – Choosing Variety

- Some varieties will not ripen here
  - Congo, Striped Klondike, Jubilee, Charleston Gray, and other long season varieties
Step 1 – Choosing Variety

- Choose varieties that are proven to do well in our area
  - Family Fun
  - Yellow Baby Hybrid
  - Sweet Favorite Hybrid
  - Mirage Hybrid
  - Mickylee
  - Minilee
  - Crimson Sweet
  - Cal Sweet
  - Golden Crown
Step 1 – Choosing Variety

- Most commercial growers in Green River plant Crimson Sweet type melons
- More round than oblong – sweet flavorful flesh
Step 1 – Choosing Variety

• It is worth the effort to plant varieties that are adapted to our area
• Hybrid seeds are more expensive, but production is usually better
Step 1 – Choosing Variety
Step 1 – Choosing Variety

• Selected cantaloupe varieties include:
  - Summet
  - Burpee Hybrid
  - Magnum
  - Ambrosia
  - Classic
  - Harper Hybrid
  - Mission
  - Rocky Sweet
Melons
Step 2 - Planting

- Plant at the right time and the right way
- Set out seeds or transplants when the soil warms above 70 degrees
- Seedless varieties need temperatures above 80 degrees to germinate
- Plant seeds 1-2 inches deep
Step 2 - Planting

• Space plants 2-3 feet apart in rows spaced 3-6 feet apart
• Small fruit types can be planted in rows 3-4 feet apart
Step 2 - Planting

- Melons need good, well-drained soil
- Clay soils do not raise a good crop
- If your soil is bad, create raised beds by adding organic matter to improve the drainage and aeration
Step 2 – Planting - Transplants

• Prefer transplants?
• Do not get those that are too large
• Start plants inside in peat pots or pellets 3-4 weeks before outside planting date
Step 2 – Planting - Transplants

• Melons do not transplant well from pony packs
• Do not disturbed their roots
• Should not be starting to vine
Step 2 – Planting - Transplants

- Transplants that are stressed or damaged while transplanting seldom produce good vines or fruits
Step 2 - Planting

- Melons need full sun and heat
- Clear plastic mulches raise soil temperature by as much as 10 degrees
  - Helps melons come into production two to three weeks earlier than normal
  - Not only produces earlier melons, but individual melons are larger
Step 2 - Planting

• Minimum spacing essential for all but bush-type melons is two by four feet, but most like even more room

• Close planting results in little or no fruit production
Step 2 - Planting
Step 3 - Watering

• Melons need adequate water
• They aren’t called watermelons for nothing
• If they are stressed, they stop growing and do not set fruit
Step 3 - Watering

• Overwatering fruiting plants causes them to collapse from lack of oxygen
• Check the soil moisture regularly and re-apply as necessary before the melons start to wilt or go into stress
• Allow the top 1-2 inches of soil to dry between watering
Step 4 - Fertilizing

• Watermelons need large vines to produce sugars to sweeten the fruits
• Weak, neglected vines produce spindly, poor quality fruits
• Use the right fertilizer
• Use a high phosphorus fertilizer to promote fruiting
Step 4 – Fertilizing

• Fertilizer with a ratio of one part nitrogen to four parts phosphorus is ideal at planting
• Make your own by mixing fertilizers together or purchase a high phosphorus product
• Add nitrogen 30 and 60 days after planting to keep the vines growing
• Large vines are produced with plenty of water and fertilizer, so allow plenty of room
Step 5 – Weeding

• Melons are not good competitors
• They do not do well if weeds shade them or compete with them for moisture and fertilizer
• Remove small weeds to avoid stunting or stressing the melons
• Avoid disturbing the roots by cultivation as this will weaken the vines and keeps them from producing fruit
Remember…

- Seedless varieties require a pollinating (non-seedless) variety close by to produce fruit
Step 6 – Harvesting

- Count the days from when the plants or seeds were planted
- Plan on 80+ days, depending on variety and growing conditions
Step 6 - Harvesting

- The curly tendril immediately opposite where melon is attached to vine turns brown and shriveled when the melon is ripe.
- The part of melon resting on the soil changes from white to yellow.
- Pick melons as they ripen.
Step 6 Harvesting
Step 6 – Harvesting
Step 6 – Harvesting

- **Yield:** several melons per vine, depending on growing conditions
- **Storage:** can be stored for a short time in a cool location
Muskmelon vs Cantaloupes

- Muskmelon (*Cucumis melo* 'reticulatus') is called cantaloupe.
- Cantaloupes are not commercially grown in the United States.
- Cantaloupes (*Cucumis melo* 'cantalupensis') are rough, warty fruits.
- Muskmelon have the characteristic netting on the outside.
True Cantaloupe
Blewah (Cucumis melo 'cantalupensis')
Honey dew

- Smooth, greenish white rind, turning creamy when ripe
- Light green, sweet flesh varieties available
- Fruit 7 x 7 1/2 inches, 5 to 6 pounds
  Cultivars: ‘Earlidew,’ ‘Honey Dew Green Flesh,’ ‘Tam Dew,’ ‘Honey Dew Orange’ (orange flesh)
Honey Dew
Casaba

- A non-slip, late maturing, corrugated yellow or greenish yellow rind
- White, spicy, sweet tender flesh
- Fruit acorn-shaped, 8 x 7 inches, 7 to 8 pounds
- Cultivars: ‘Casaba Golden Beauty,’ ‘Casaba Sungold’, ‘Marygold’
Casaba
Crenshaw

- Large, late maturing, yellow and green corrugated rind without netting
- Pinkish orange, sweet, tender flesh with distinctive flavor
- Fruit is elongated with a flattened stem end, 9 x 7 inches, 7 to 10 pounds
- Cultivars: ‘Crenshaw,’ ‘Honeyshaw’ (early), ‘Early Hybrid Crenshaw,’ ‘Crenshaw Blanco,’ ‘Golden Crenshaw’
Crenshaw
Canary

• Late maturing, bright yellow corrugated rind
• Flesh is pale green to white with a sweet and distinctive flavor
  Fruit is oval, similar to crenshaw, 8 x 6 inches, 6 to 7 pounds
• Cultivars: ‘Sweet Yellow Canary,’ ‘Tenerife’ ‘Amy’
Melon ‘Amy’
Melon Diseases

- Melons are usually not bothered by many pests
- Verticillium and fusarium wilts often develop if areas are gardened for many years
- Rotate planting locations and use resistant varieties if plants die in midsummer
Melon Diseases - Wilt

- Plants wilt and die, older leaves first
- Light brown streaks show inside the stem when it is split lengthwise
- Destroy infected plants immediately and rotate planting location
Melon Diseases – Powdery Mildew

- White powdery spots on leaves and stems eventually enlarges and covers entire leaf
- Plant resistant varieties
- Dusting sulfur may help, but will burn some varieties
Melon Diseases - Mosaic

• Irregularly shaped light and dark green spots on leaves
• Plants become stunted and melons may be misshapen or discolored
• Aphids transmit this virus but controlling the aphids is not practical
• Destroy infected plants immediately and rotate planting location
Melon Insects - Aphids

• Deformed or curled leaves
• Green, brown, or black soft bodied insects on under sides of leaves
• Sticky honeydew or black sooty mold sometimes present
• Treatment
  - Strong water spray or insecticidal soap spray
  - Must get spray on the insects to be effective
    Some damage can be tolerated
Melon Insects – Squash Bugs

• Leaves with small specks that turn yellow, then brown
• Vines wilt from point of attack to end of vine
• Adults are about 5/8 inch long, grayish or yellowish brown

• Treatment
  - Trap adults beneath boards in spring--turn over boards in morning and kill bugs
  - Handpick adults, egg mass and young bugs off plants
Melons

- Melons are not the easiest plants to grow, but they are worth the effort.
- The hot summer days are made a little easier with melons as treats for the perfect refreshment.
- Plant some this year.
The End

Happy Eating!