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veggies

Melons: First key to success is not to rush

Don't give up on melons in the home garden. Home gardeners well into the far north can succeed with this often troublesome family if attention is paid to culture and selection.

The first key to melon success is not to rush the planting season. Both cantaloupes or muskmelons and watermelons are most definitely warm soil and air lovers. Since many areas do not have sufficient warm days to allow plants directly seeded to the garden to develop, get a jump on the timetable by using started transplants. These transplants should be purchased in individual peat or plastic containers so that roots will not be disturbed when placed in the garden.

To add additional soil warmth for rapid growth, mulch all melons with black plastic. Lay black plastic two to three weeks before planting to build up soil warmth in earnest. At planting time, cut holes at two to three feet intervals for cantaloupe transplants; six feet intervals for watermelons.

Look for varieties of both cantaloupes and watermelons with shorter season requirements. Hybrid cantaloupe varieties such as Ball 1776 will have ripe fruit in 84 days from transplanting. Another hybrid bonus is the genetic disease resistance to leaf problems.

When space is at a premium, trellis Ball

1776 during vining. Once fruit has started to set, cut mesh or nylon strips for pouches. Tie these to the trellis and rest the fruit in the pouch to develop.

EVERBODY loves a baby, but not enough people have had the opportunity to appreciate Yellow Baby, a short season midsize yellow watermelon which will succeed where the large icebox types fail. What can you expect with this yellow melon? Fewer seeds, much sweeter flavor than the icebox types and produce weighing up to 10 pounds at harvest time.

Make sure to use a fertilizer developed for early rapid growth at transplanting time. These fertilizers bear high percentages of phosphorus and will have analyses printed on the package with ratios such as 10-52-10 or 10-52-17. To make your own organic counterpart, mix one cup of steamed bonemeal in a gallon of water, and use one cup per garden plant.

Although gardeners cannot turn off excessive summer rains, they can add moisture in periods of drought. This will heighten melon flavor. Either too much or too little water will take a toll on melon flavor.

Two major pests trouble melons in the garden patch. Cucumber beetles can be controlled; Hungry kids aren't quite so easy.

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