

CANTALOUPE

Muskmelon, Melo, Pepo

Cucumis melo

Cucurbitaceae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Description

The Cantaloupe is a creeping annual gourd producing round or oval fruits, 10-15cm (4-6") diameter with a rough, scaly, netted outside skin. Cantaloupes were originally grown in the hot, dry savanna regions of Africa and southwest Asia. Egyptian, Chinese and Greek art included this edible fruit from the year 3000 BC. Cantaloupe seeds yield edible oils and the oil is used as an ingredient in fragrances and cosmetics.

Cultivation

Cantaloupe seeds should be planted at the beginning of the spring or rainy season, in rich, porous soil, 1-2 cm (0.5-1in) deep. The plant prefers a hot, dry climate and full sun but with moisture at its roots. The vines can be staked to avoid contact with wet earth. A collar of soil around the base of the stem (not touching it) will avoid stem rot. Cantaloupes tend to produce an excess number of blossoms, many of which will fall off naturally.

Harvesting and Seed Production

Harvest Cantaloupes when the fruits separate easily from the stem and the skin between the netting is no longer green. The stem end will be slightly soft. The seeds are mature when the fruit is ready to eat. Cut the Cantaloupe in half, scoop out the seeds, put seeds in a clear container and cover with water to ferment for 3 days. The good seeds should settle to the bottom. Rinse, then dry the seeds on a screen or wax paper either indoors or outdoors. Store in an airtight container in a cool place for up to five years. Seeds from overripe fruit do not store well and should be planted as soon as possible.

Pests and Diseases

"Dampening off" of seedlings results from fungi that have contaminated the soil where seeds were planted. Sterilize the soil that will contact the seeds by heating it, rotate the crop from place to place each season or plant in soil that is rich with organic matter. These steps may also avoid damage to the roots from root knot nematodes. Pick the fruits as soon as they are ripe and keep them off the ground using boards, baskets, stones or staking.

Cooking and Nutrition

Most Cantaloupe is consumed fresh, some is pickled or frozen. Its aroma can penetrate other stored food so it should be wrapped and kept as cool as possible after harvesting. This fruit is a good source of potassium, phosphorus and calcium as are many fruits and vegetables.

References

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