

SPECIALTY MUSKMELONS

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Cantaloupe or muskmelon (*Cucumis melo*) production is an important vegetable crop in Virginia. In 2001, Virginia producers grew 800 acres of cantaloupes valued at \$1.4 million. However, there is much diversity in this group, with more types of melons than the traditional orange flesh cantaloupes and each having unique flavors, textures, and appearance. Some of these specialty melons have potential for small-scale production and direct marketing. Some of many types are:

Charentais melon



A popular European melon, also called a French melon. It has a smooth or slightly netted, gray-green rind with dark green, slightly furrowed sutures. Flesh is very sweet, firm, and deep orange. Fruit is slightly elongated, but mostly globe shaped. Size is 3-4" and 1.5-2.5 lbs. Observations from our early plantings indicate that fruit cracking can occur when the fruit is left on the vine for optimum sweetness. It's a favorite in our early taste tests. Some varieties are 'Savor', and 'Edonis'.

Japanese melon

This type generally refers to the high-priced greenhouse grown gift melon found in Japan, but it can be field produced in Virginia. These melons are round or slightly oval, very sweet, about 7-8", 3-4 lbs and extremely well-netted green rind. Flesh is most often green, very sweet, and firm. Fruit should be harvested prior to the slip stage. Some varieties are 'Emerald Jewel' and 'Emerald Sweet'.

Galia melon



Originally produced in Israel and very popular in Europe, this melon is fragrant with soft green flesh and yellow well-netted rind. The rind goes from green to yellow when ripe. Fruit should be harvested prior to the slip stage. Galia melons in our early observations have been around 5 lbs. Some varieties are 'Arava' and 'Lavigal'.

Oriental crisp-flesh melon



Oriental melons have been popular in the Far East for thousands of years, but are a relatively new melon in the United States. There are two types of oriental melons. One type is sweet, the other bland and often used for pickling. The sweet melons can be oblong or round, and rind color is yellow, green, or white when ripe, depending on type. Fruits of most varieties are relatively small averaging less than 2 lbs. Most have white flesh that is crisp. Some varieties are 'New Century' and 'Jade Flower'.



Each of these melon types have unique textures, flavors, and vary in their sweetness. Some have more sweetness and flavor than the traditional cantaloupe. However, there are a few issues to overcome with the melons. Most have a short shelf-life and therefore would be most appealing to growers able to direct market at roadside stands, farmers markets, or from the farm. Also, as most consumers are familiar with traditional cantaloupes, acceptance of a different (sometimes odd looking) product can call for creative marketing. Determination of the optimum time to harvest can also be a challenging production issue with these melons.

At VSU's Randolph Farm and at two farms in southside Virginia, we are testing six varieties for yield, fruit quality, and overall production and marketing information. In a future issue of this newsletter the results of the trials will be published.

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