

You may grow Cantaloupe in the vegetable garden. But, no doubt about it.....they're a fruit. And a deliciously juicy fruit at that! Also, called melons and Muskmelons, they are a vining crop that requires a lot of garden space, and warm temperatures. This versatile fruit is so tasty, that it's served at breakfast, lunch, dinner and snack time, too.

We recommend growing a few cantaloupe, and some Honey Dew melons. The combination looks and tastes great.

How to Grow Cantaloupe and Melons:

Cantaloupe prefers full sun and a rich soil. They like warm weather. Soil should be kept moist.

Plant cantaloupe after the last frost in your area when the soil begins to warm. Planting in "hills" is common. Sow cantaloupe and melon seeds four to six seeds per hill. Sow 1/2 to 1 inch deep. Space the hills four to six feet apart. If you choose not to hill, sow seeds three to four inches apart. Row spacing should be five to six feet.

Seedlings can be started indoors. We recommend using peat pellets to help to minimize transplant shock.

After germination, thin and keep the three or four healthiest plants. The more compact "bush" types may tolerate closer spacing.

Fertilize plants regularly. Plants need a lot of water. Give them a good soaking once or twice a week.

Train vines, as needed to keep them from crossing over each other.

Be vigilant to insect and disease problems. Treat problems early.

Melons are a tender annual. Frost will quickly kill the plants. If frost is predicted, cover the plants.

Harvesting:

Days to Maturity: Approximately 75 to 95 days, depending upon variety.

Melons are ripe when the stem begins to dry out. The end of the melon is soft when pressed with your thumb. A melon is over ripe when it is soft all over. Melons can be picked just prior to ripening.

Melons store unrefrigerated for about a week, and keep for weeks in your refrigerator.

Insects , Pests, and Disease:

Among the most common insect problems are the cucumber beetle and the squash vine borer. Of these, borers are the most damaging. Treatment before the emergence of insects is recommended.

Organic Squash Vine Borer Control

Good organic control of squash vine borers involves using a combo of several different methods. Butternut squash and other varieties classified as *Cucurbita moschata* are naturally resistant to squash vine borers. In early summer, surround the plants with small yellow pails two-thirds full of water. The adult orange and black moths are attracted by the color yellow, and often drop in and drown.

Mice and moles also enjoy melons. Placing a board under the fruit is one means of deterrence.

Powdery mildew and other fungus diseases can be a major problem. If you find a leaf that is seriously infected with white powdery mildew (nearly covered with the stuff), remove it. Prune it. Hack it to bits. Make sure the clippers you're using are clean, and after you're finished, wash them off thoroughly.

Fill a squirt bottle with a mixture of water and a small amount of milk (perhaps 20-30% milk). I've heard skim milk works as well, and you can even add a very small amount of dish soap to make it adhere to the leaves. Spray the leaves with this mixture every few days. In my experience, this is only truly effective early on, before the growth of mildew has gotten too out-of-control.

You can also fill a squirt bottle with a mixture of water and a small amount of baking soda (perhaps a tablespoon) and apply it to your infected leaves.

If one solution doesn't work, try the other. I've personally used the milk and water mixture, and I did see an improvement (although my powdery mildew situation was pretty dire, as I hadn't been paying attention).

Again, this works best early on, before the mildew has spread too much. If it's still early in the season and your pumpkin leaves are completely overtaken by powdery mildew, it might actually be better to simply start over.

The above mixtures may be effective at stopping the spread of infection, but they may not actually cure it.

You might also want to occasionally spray your leaves as a preventative measure.

How To Prevent Future Powdery Mildew

Air circulation is probably the single best defense against powdery mildew. Don't crowd your pumpkins in a small area. Allow a good amount of space between leaves for air to flow, and don't hesitate to clip leaves here and there to accomplish this. Also be sure to keep the area clean of fallen leaves and debris.

Just as well, make sure you're planting in a sunny location. Only water in the morning or when the sun is shining, and not later in the day, as the leaves won't dry as well otherwise. You might even try watering under the leaves.