

Cantaloupe

Cucumis melo (Cucurbitaceae)

Fast Facts:

Acres in Washington: 300 Acres in 2007
Number of Growers: 30
Per Acre Value: \$4000
Value of Production in Washington: \$1,200,000

Description

Of crop:

Cantaloupes are the mostly widely grown type of muskmelon. Muskmelon is a species of melon that has been developed into many cultivated varieties. They include smooth skinned varieties such as honeydew and different netted cultivars of cantaloupes. Cantaloupes are relatives of cucumbers, squash, pumpkin, watermelon and gourds. They are produced on long-running annual plants or non-climbing vines that are prostrate on the soil. The vines grow to about 18 inches long. Cantaloupe is a warm season crop that has a substantial volume of fibrous roots. It has large, soft-hairy leaves that are heart shaped and lobed. Fruits may be orange fleshed or green fleshed and are generally sweet. The fruit surface is usually netted and roughened and the shape is generally round to oval. Fruit size ranges from 5 to 8" and varies from 3-7 lbs. They are grown from mid-July to September. The most common type of cantaloupe in Washington is the hybrid eastern. The most common varieties are Aphrodite, Minerva and Athena. These have a tan rind that is coarse with light to medium sutures. Their flesh is orange and both the Athena and Aphrodite are good shippers.

Cantaloupe vines have separate male and female flowers and bees are required for pollination. This is essential not only for the fruit set but also for the sugar content. The female plant is said to be sweeter than the male plant. For commercial plantings, the United States Department of Agriculture recommends at least one hive of honeybees are needed per acre for pollination. High temperatures can cause cantaloupes to produce only male blooms, which result in poor fruit set. Cantaloupes are hand harvested at the "full slip" stage, which is when the stem pulls away from the fruit leaving a scar at the stem end. They are usually picked by hand but growers may also utilize a harvest aid, which is a tractor pulled conveyor belt that helps transport the melons. Growers pick and pack their own melons thus labor availability and costs can be a key issue. In Washington State, melons are sold through three markets: local markets, regional markets which include restaurants and grocery stores, and the national markets where growers sell to large grocery chains.

Key pests:

The main pests in cantaloupe are weeds. These include barnyard grass, Russian thistle, kochia, lambsquarter and pigweed. Diseases aren't recognized as a pest in

melons in eastern Washington production. The arid conditions, minimal and scattered acreage keeps disease pressures low. All melons in Washington are grown on drip irrigation, under plastic. The only pest of cantaloupe are wireworms. They feed on roots and can burrow up into the melon when the fruit is in contact with the soil.

Key pesticides:

Weeds are controlled through hand weeding and cultivation. Early season, middle rows can be sprayed with Round-up. Using plastic aids in weed control, moisture retention and promotes earliness. Growers should rotate their ground to avoid diseases and wireworm issues. They can fumigate the soil with Telone or metam sodium.

Critical pest

Control issues:

Growers have a problem later in the season with mice and voles. They get under the plastic and feed on the drip tape causing leaks in the irrigation system.

Expert contacts:

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Location

Of Production: Yakima, Benton, Franklin and Grant counties.



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Cantaloupe Production in Washington State



Area of Cantaloupe Production