



Melons

Melons are in the *Cucurbitaceae* (gourd) family – same as cucumbers and squash. Botanically they are fruit, they grow as annuals, and they thrive in Ventura County’s long, warm growing season with full sun (minimum 6 hours). There are more than 1,200 varieties of melon.

Melon Types and Varieties to Consider

Overview – melons are grouped by type based on flesh color, rind texture, flavor, and days to maturity.

- **Cantaloupe / Muskmelon** – netted skin, orange flesh, musky sweet aroma; one of the most popular melons for home gardens. Days to maturity: 75–90.
 - **Hale’s Best** – heirloom; silky texture, sweet orange flesh, and proven ability to thrive in hot weather – a Ventura County classic.
 - **Ambrosia** – sweet, disease-resistant; excellent flavor for fresh eating.
 - **Sarah’s Choice** – compact vines; good for smaller spaces and raised beds.
 - **Ha-Ogen** – short-season Israeli variety; suitable for warmer climates.
 - **Minnesota Midget** – ideal for containers or patios; sweet orange flesh with a good yield of early fruit.
- **Honeydew Melon** – smooth pale rind, green or white flesh; sweeter and milder than cantaloupe. Days to maturity: 80–100.
 - **Honey White** – pale skin and creamy texture; known for high sugar content.
 - **Earli-Dew** – earlier harvest than most honeydews; sweet with good flavor.
 - **Honey World** – hybrid with a reliable sweet flavor profile.
 - **Ice Cream** – small but prolific; very sweet taste.
 - **Green Flesh** – heirloom; thick green flesh with honey flavor and hints of apple and cucumber.
- **Watermelon** – needs the most heat and space of all melons; excellent for Ventura’s inland areas. Days to maturity: 70–90.
 - **Crimson Sweet** – classic full-sized variety; dark red flesh and high sugar content.
 - **Sugar Baby** – small, compact, early-maturing; sweet and juicy – great for smaller gardens.
 - **Yellow Crimson** – visually striking; sweet yellow flesh, same shape as standard watermelon.
 - **Yellow Doll** – compact, early-maturing; small sweet fruits – ideal for smaller gardens.
- **Specialty Melons** – a diverse group of aromatic, flavorful varieties from around the world; well worth trying in Ventura’s climate.
 - **Crenshaw** – large, sweet melon; 110 days – one of the best-tasting specialty varieties.
 - **Galia** – Israeli variety; very sweet with a tropical, aromatic flavor.
 - **Charentais** – French heirloom; intensely aromatic, considered one of the world’s finest melons.



- **Piel de Sapo (Santa Claus / Christmas Melon)** – creamy white, sweet, juicy flesh; stores exceptionally well into winter.

Basic Care: QR code will take you to the Soil to Sprouts slide deck on the Ventura County Master Gardener website.



- **Seeds or Transplant** – both work well; transplants give an earlier harvest. Direct sow when soil reaches 65°F+. Space plants 8–10 inches apart in rows, or plant in hills of 2–3 seeds.
- **Mulch the Soil Surface** – apply a 3–4-inch layer of organic mulch to retain moisture, warm the soil, and suppress weeds.
- **Watering** – water deeply and consistently, especially during flowering and fruit set. Reduce watering as fruits approach maturity to concentrate sugars. Drip irrigation is ideal.
- **Support** – large vining varieties need plenty of space; smaller varieties can be trellised vertically – use fabric slings to support developing fruit.
- **Fertilizer** – use a general purpose (10-10-10) fertilizer at planting; switch to a lower-nitrogen formula once vines begin flowering to encourage fruit set.
- **Raised Beds or Containers?** – compact varieties (Minnesota Midget, Sugar Baby) can be grown in large containers (15+ gallons); use potting soil or a blend of compost/topsoil/vermiculite.
- **Pollination** – melons require insect pollination – do not spray insecticides when flowers are open. If fruit set is poor, try hand-pollinating by transferring pollen from male to female flowers with a small brush.

When to Harvest:

- Melons **do not** continue to ripen after picking – harvest at the right time is critical.
 - **Cantaloupe / Muskmelon** – will easily slip off the vine with slight pressure (“full slip”); the stem end shows a concave dip and the skin turns from green to tan/yellow between the netting. Fragrance is a good indicator of ripeness.
 - **Honeydew** – won’t slip easily; the rind should turn from pale green to creamy yellow and the blossom end should yield slightly to gentle pressure.
 - **Watermelon** – the tendril nearest the fruit should be dried and brown; the ground spot (where it rests on soil) should turn from white to yellow; thump test – a ripe melon produces a deep, hollow sound.
- **Storage** – whole: up to 1 week on the counter or 2–3 weeks in the refrigerator. Once cut: 2–4 days covered in the refrigerator.

Harvesting:

- Harvest in the morning when fruits are cool for the best flavor.
- Use a sharp knife or pruning shears – do not pull or twist, which can damage the vine.
- Once a melon is removed from the vine, ripening stops – there is no “grace period” as there is with some other fruits.





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