

## COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION OF

# *Cantaloupes*

in Mississippi

Cantaloupes do not tolerate cool temperatures very well, so wait until soil is warm before planting seeds.



### **Soil**

Cantaloupe will grow on a variety of soil types in Mississippi. Good internal and surface drainage is important, and a raised row of 4 to 8 inches can improve drainage. The pH of the soil should be between 6.0 and 6.5.

### **Varieties**

Magnum-45, Dixie Jumbo, and Athena are popular cantaloupe varieties grown in Mississippi. Consider market preferences before choosing a cantaloupe variety.

### **Planting Dates**

Approximate planting dates for Mississippi include the following:

Coastal Counties	March 1
South Central	March 15
Central	April 1
North Central	April 5
North	April 10

### **Seeding Rate**

Buy disease-free seeds and treat with fungicide to control damping off and an insecticide to control seed corn maggot. Approximately one pound of seed is needed per acre planted to cantaloupe. Space 5 to 6 feet between rows and 2 to 3 feet in a row.

### **Fertilizer**

Apply according to results of a soil test. As a general recommendation, apply 500 pounds of 10-10-20 per acre, and sidedress with an additional 50 pounds of actual nitrogen when vines begin to run.

### **Irrigation**

On sandy soils, cantaloupe should receive 3/4 inch water twice a week. On loamy soils, 1 1/2 inches of water can be applied once a week. If using overhead irrigation, apply in early afternoon so foliage will dry before nightfall.

### **Pollination**

Cantaloupes require bee pollination, so take care when applying insecticides and avoid times when bees are active. Make sure insecticide does not drift to hives.

### **Diseases**

Cantaloupes have a number of diseases to guard against, including alternaria leafspot (circular light-brown zonate-type spots on leaves); anthracnose (circular brown spots on leaves); downy mildew (yellow spots on upper side of leaves, later turning into irregular brown spots); gummy stem blight (large irregular brown spots on leaves); powdery mildew (grayish, pow-

der-like mold on upper and lower leaf surfaces); and Southern blight (plant suddenly wilts and dies, white mold on stem at soil line).

Begin spraying cantaloupe crop with fungicides at first bloom or as soon as disease appears. To prevent diseases, alternate fungicides every 2 weeks. At first appearance of a disease, identify, then treat according to procedure outlined in the current issue of "Disease, Insect, and Nematode Control Recommendations for Commercial Vegetables in Mississippi," Extension Publication 554. Observe waiting period between last spray and harvest.

## Insects

Insects that commonly attack cantaloupe include aphids, cabbage loopers, cutworms, pickleworms, spider mites, spotted and striped cucumber beetles, and squash bugs. Insects can carry diseases into the field. For example, gummy stem blight may be introduced into a field by the cucumber beetle. Scout for insects regularly.

Once bloom begins, protect by spraying weekly with insecticides. Observe label precautions as to harvest intervals. If a particular insect problem occurs, refer to Extension Publication 554 for control measures.

## Weed Control

Curbit (ethalfluralin) can be used at planting to control grasses and small broad leaves. Prefar (bensulide) can be used preplant to control annual grasses. Dactahl (DCPA) can be used to control germinating grass seedlings when vines begin to form. Treflan (trifluralin) can be applied as a directed spray **between** rows for grass control. Poast can be used to control emerged grasses.

## Harvest

Harvest at 1/2 to full slip (when stems separate completely from fruit). Cool by forced air or by hydrocooling, and store at 32 to 35 degrees Fahrenheit.

## Yield

An acre of cantaloupes should produce 3,000 marketable melons.

## Costs

Approximate costs per acre:

Preharvest	\$400
Harvest	\$360

The information given here is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended of other products that may also be suitable.

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