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HS626

Melon, Honeydew — *Cucumis melo* L. (Inodorus group)[1]

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The honeydew melon is one of the most popular melons, belonging to the Inodorus group of *C. melo* that also includes the casaba melon. Of course, the best known member of the winter melon group is cantaloupe. Honeydew is an American name for the French variety 'White Antibes,' which was grown for many years in southern France and Algeria for foreign shipment.

Figure 1.

DESCRIPTION

While the honeydew plant is similar to cantaloupe except for more lobing of the leaf, the fruits are distinctive. They are round to slightly oval, about 8 inches long, and are extremely smooth with no netting or ribs. Some soft hairs are present on the surface in early stages. Rind color is greenish-white when immature, becoming somewhat creamy yellow when ripe. The flesh is light green, thick, juicy, sweet, and uniquely flavored.

CULTURE, HARVESTING, AND RIPENING

Commercial varieties of honeydew in the past have not done well in Florida. Greatest success with their culture has been with irrigation in semiarid regions of the country. Our humid conditions with accompanying diseases and insect problems have made them a poor choice for both gardeners and commercial farmers alike. The strains or varieties available are extremely susceptible to downy and powdery mildew, two serious diseases of other cucurbits in Florida.

Whenever melons are produced, there is difficulty in ripening and harvesting them. Fruits of most honeydews do not slip (separate) from the vine at maturity as do muskmelons, so must be clipped. Without this signal of maturity, other fruit characteristics such as a size, skin color, and smoothness must be used to determine when to pick.

A breakthrough was made for Florida gardeners and growers in 1962 when a variety called 'Floridew' was released. It has resistance to downy mildew and to a lesser extent powdery mildew. However, the fruit still do not slip and have to be treated with ethylene gas for proper ripening. Failure of growers to learn to grow and ripen it properly

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resulted in a decline of available seed stock and interest in the honeydew.

Interest in honeydews was regenerated in 1976 with the release of 'Morgan' by Florida plant breeder James Morgan Crill. The 'Morgan' melon resulted from a cross between a regular honeydew and a cob-melon (unknown origin). The 'Morgan' is similar in size, shape, and color to 'Asgrow Honeydew.' Like other honeydews, 'Morgan' melons will not slip from the vine at harvest except for about 25% of the fruit. Gardeners should watch for the development of distinct blotches or streaks of yellow appearing on the creamy white surface as an indication for time to harvest. This should occur in 80 to 90 days from seeding to first fruit picking. It was reputed to have high tolerance to downy mildew, but not to powdery mildew.

However, Florida grower trials resulted in moderate to severe foliage damage in many instances where conditions were ideal for the downy mildew disease. 'Morgan' in Florida is still a promising variety, but a gardener should expect results ranging from outstanding to poor.

In addition to 'Morgan' and 'Floridew,' two other varieties worth trying are 'Earlidew' and 'Tamdew.' The honeydew is a warm weather crop and should be planted to grow in a frost-free period. Gardeners should follow similar cultural practices as for muskmelons.

Ripening is a problem with honeydews. Home gardeners who have difficulty getting melons to ripen should place one or more melons in a sealed plastic bag along with ripening tomatoes or apples. The natural ethylene gas released in the process will trigger the ripening of the honeydew.