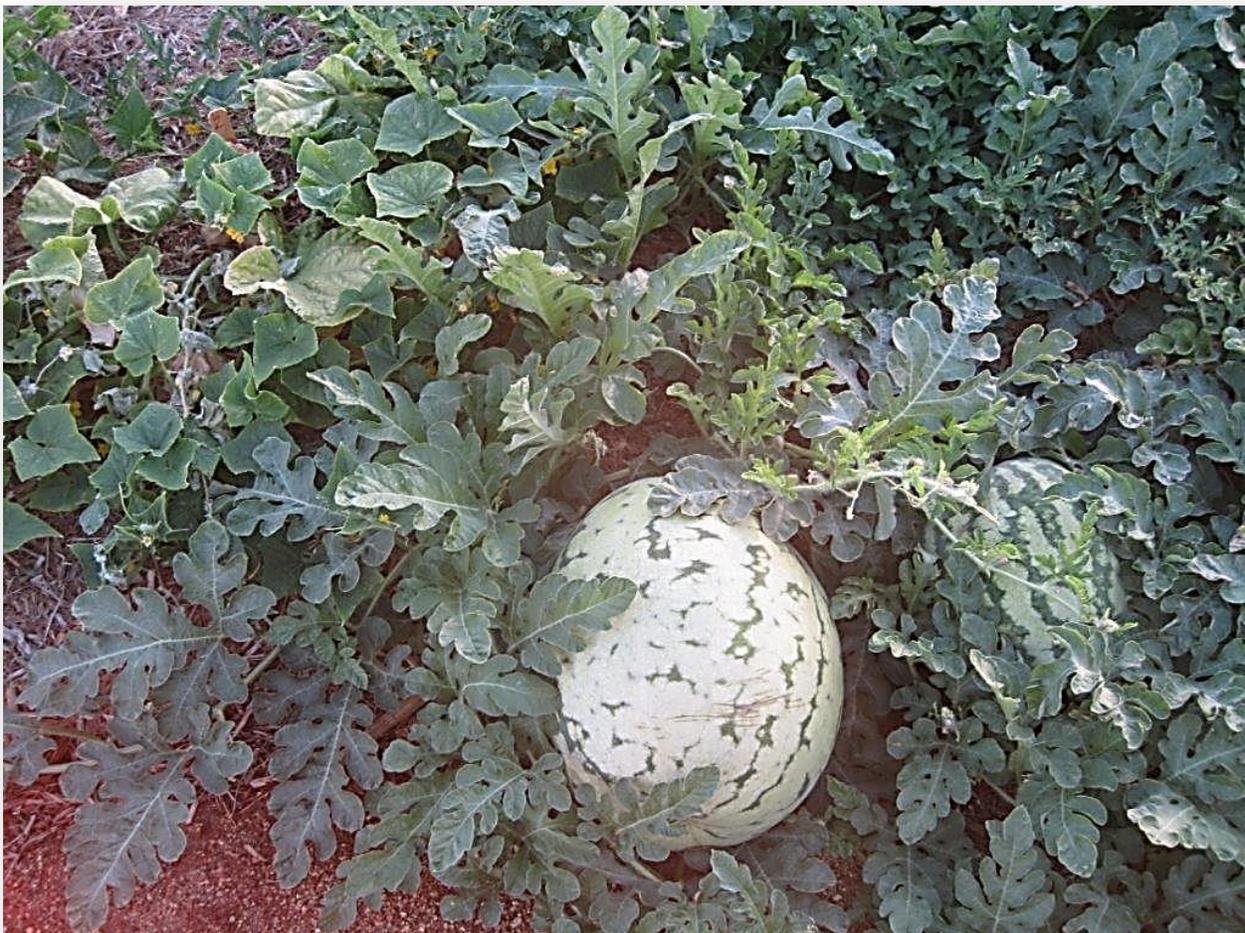


## Melons grow in Mojave summer

Here in Southern Nevada, we are figuring out what will survive through our excruciatingly hot summer.

Many of us know tomatoes are “warm season” vegetables, but that only means they grow best when the weather is warm, not hot. As temperatures rise into triple digits, it is sad to see our nearly ripe tomatoes become severely cracked, or green tomatoes become blistered with sunscald. Unless one is ready to perform extreme measures, the optimum time to get these delicious fruits from the garden is in June, not July or August. There is hope, however. In mid-summer, it is a good idea to cut the plants down to a couple of inches, water the soil, cover it with mulch, and wait for new foliage and fruit in September.

That does not mean the garden will be blank for the summer months, because some of our favorite vegetables and fruits thrive in hot weather. Yes, melons and squash will grow during the sizzling summer, but they do require a certain amount of preparation. All the melons, pumpkins and squash (both winter and summer) are related, and most have similar requirements if they are to flourish.



*Melons grow at Cooperative Extension's Demonstration Gardens*

Melons and squash can grow directly from seed. They do not need to grow as transplants, although if transplants are available, definitely use them.

The soil where they are planted needs to be fertile, since that is where they acquire essential nutrients. If there is any question about its fertility, add compost and bone meal. The compost adds nutrition and improves both drainage and water holding capacity. Bone meal is a good source of the element phosphorus, necessary for proper blooming and fruiting.

I discuss melons here specifically, but most squash benefit from the same techniques.

Because they are vines, cantaloupe (“muskmelon”) plants can be trained to grow on trellises. This is a particularly good technique when garden space is limited. These plants are big water consumers, and on trellises the large leaves lose moisture very rapidly. Cantaloupes must not be allowed to become dry, as this will lower the yield and quality of your crop.

The first few flowers are male, so they will not be fruiting. After the plant is established, the flowers will be perfect, (male and female parts). These produce the fruit. If using a trellis, remember the heavy fruits will need support.

Powdery mildew (PM) is their most common disease. This fungus does not kill, since it needs a living host. What PM does, however, is shade the leaves with white powdery spores. The weakened plant cannot fight this disease well. It will still produce fruit, which will be less tasty than otherwise. Fortunately, neem oil and powdered sulfur are both fairly effective as control measures.

Their other pest is the dreaded squash bug. Insecticides are not particularly effective. Diatomaceous earth spread around the plants can limit them. Plants grown on trellises may escape their predation. Unpleasant as it sounds, many gardeners have found that the best control of these creatures is a wet-dry vacuum.

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