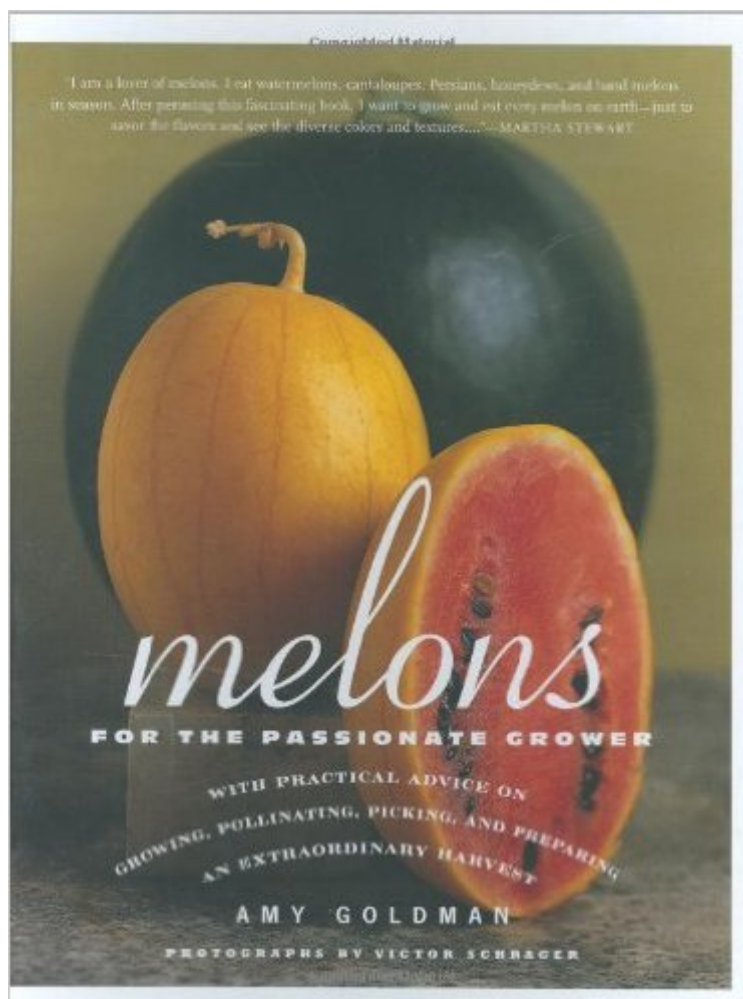


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Melons For The Passionate Grower



Synopsis

This year's heirloom tomato is a melon! Acclaimed gardener Amy Goldman, known to viewers of Martha Stewart and PBS, is a dedicated seed saver working to preserve fast-disappearing varieties of heirloom melons. Her book, *Melons for the Passionate Grower*, is a celebration of the speckled, bumpy, oh-so-sweet world of the melon—from Minnesota Midget and Georgia Rattlesnake to Ali Baba and Sweet Siberian. Here she profiles more than one hundred varieties, each showcased in a full-color photographic still life recalling eighteenth- and nineteenth-century botanical paintings and engravings. Goldman also offers expert advice on cultivating and selecting your own melons, as well as the rudiments of seed saving.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I planted Charentais cantaloupe seeds this summer and grew a dozen or so fruits along with the Moon and Stars watermelon. Both of these melons are antique varieties, so you won't find either in most supermarkets. My grand children told me the Moon and Stars watermelon were "sweeter than the `big ones'", meaning those purchased by the side of the road or their local grocery store. One photograph in *MELONS* by Amy Goldman shows the Charentais filled with port wine and looking scrumptious. Goldman describes the melon as not very sweet. I ate the Charentais melons myself and found them quite rich, but not terribly sweet. The photo of a Charentais cantaloupe half filled with port wine pretty much informs you about the content of this book -- which is a pretty picture-book, not a gardening book. Don't get me wrong, I like lovely photos as much as the next

person, and this book has plenty of them. However, I was looking for a gardening book and this book is not a "how-to" grow melons as far as I am concerned, but more of a "what to do with them after you have them in hand" (including looking at them). What I know about cantaloupe growing I have learned through trial and error and from other sources such as neighbors. The one thing you may learn from this book is that most US consumers are aware of the existence of only a very few melons. Goldman wants you to know the world contains a diversity of these fruit. Some look like gourds, some like pumpkins and some like spaghetti squash. Goldman has included much anecdotal information about each of her featured melons. Even though it won't help me become a better melon grower, I am glad I bought the book, because it contains a wealth of information about a favorite fruit. BTW if you want gardening information about growing antique melons, get the Seeds of Change catalogue through their web site.

I agonized over the five star dilemma for awhile; does one small nagging problem warrant deleting down to four stars? In the end, the charm of this book won me over completely. This is a book for someone who has a basic knowledge of gardening. Indeed, the title hints at this but most of us would expect a gardening book to cater to beginners, which it doesn't. In fact, I would say that it would be best if the reader had at least tried growing melons once before. Apparently, melons are a little more high-maintenance than tomatoes and beans -- but the author only spares a small cursory section on melon culture, the better to get down to the real reason to own this treasure: a thoroughly engaging and informative tribute to each known variety of heirloom melon still surviving today. Each melon variety is comprehensively detailed with a photograph and a short history and description. Amy Goldman makes a very good case for the growing of heirloom (Open Pollinated) varieties, by the way. I won't get into the details, but if superior flavor is your reason for growing your own produce, heirlooms will blow all those mealy, watery grocery store hybrids right off their shelves. By the time you get two pages into the gorgeously photographed catalog of her melons you will be salivating and wishing you had gotten the jump on the summer planting season a little earlier. Before you finish this book you will decide that nothing else but your very own Charentais cantaloupes (12 and 1/4 on the Brix sweetnes scale) and Cream of Saskatchewan watermelons (10 degrees Brix) will do. Bottom line is, this book will light a fire under you to develop a genuine passion about your home garden and the types of fruits you grow in it. So I can recommend this book even though I have yet to apply its advice to the actual growing. After all, you need the inspiration before you can get off your duff to apply the perspiration!

The melons covered in the book range from the true cantaloupe to muskmelons (what Americans call cantaloupe) to casabas to Asian melons (not sweet like those to which Americans are accustomed) to those that aren't tasty (but are valued for other reasons) to every color flesh and seed, size and shape of watermelon under the sun! How about a melon to scent a person or a room, a melon to stand in for a cucumber in a salad (bitterfree, crisper, and will set fruit all summer long), a melon that looks for all the world like a winter squash, a bi-colored-flesh watermelon, or a watermelon whose skin turns a bright yellow when it is ripe? These are the Queen Anne's pocket melon or the D'Alger melon, the Snake melons, the Prescott Fond Blanc melon, the Colorado Striped Tarahumara watermelon, and the Golden Midget watermelon. Don't have room to grow your own melons? Then the pages about how to select a melon, even at market, will be invaluable--already I have been able to improve my chances of coming home with a riper melon from the store. I have one tiny complaint about the content of the book: there are several varieties that are listed with "Seed Source: None". I assume these melons that are not available from commercial seed sources are available among the Seed Savers Exchange organization members, but that is never mentioned. My other complaint about the book is technical: it's not what most of us would consider a "hardback". It has a firm cover, but it's not a hardback in the traditional textbook sense. All in all, a very lovely book, one that makes you wish you had 10 acres in which to just grow melons. It has been an engrossing read and re-read, an indispensable book in planning our future forays into melon-growing.

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