

# A jewel in the melon patch

This was another bad year for melon production in North Dakota. Cold, wet conditions in spring and an early frost in fall did not help.

North Dakota will never be a “hotbed” for melon production—because our gardens will never get the “heat” they need for great production.

There are lots of strategies to get around this; namely start with transplants in the field, use black (or blue) plastic mulch, and grow the crop inside high tunnels or at least on raised beds.

There is an easier way. Simply choose a super early variety that is foolproof. Let me introduce to you ‘Sun Jewel’ melon.

‘Sun Jewel’ is not a watermelon and it is not a muskmelon or cantaloupe. It is sometimes referred to as an “Asian” melon. Indeed, it is from Korea.

We have tested ‘Sun Jewel’ across North Dakota for years and it is clearly the most reliable quality melon we have come across.

‘Sun Jewel’ ripens extra early (about 78 days from sowing) and



is very productive. The vines resist diseases. The fruits are oval, about 7 inches long and 4 inches wide. They have a lemon yellow rind with shallow white ribs.

Among melons, I enjoy growing cantaloupe because I always know when a cantaloupe is ripe. I look for a cantaloupe with a golden glow and then give it a gentle tug. A ripe melon will “slip” off the vine when it is fully ripe.

On the other hand, I don’t enjoy growing watermelon because I never know when a watermelon is ripe. I’ve read about all of the signs of ripeness. I look for the dried tendril near the fruit. And I thump the melon. To be honest, I never know for sure a watermelon is ripe until I slice into it. The same goes for honeydews and other exotic melons. It’s always a guessing game.

‘Sun Jewel’ will slip when it is ripe. No guessing! No worries!

Its flavor is different—in a good way. The flesh is white and sweet. It reminds me of a ripe pear. It’s definitely worth a try.

Again, it is foolproof. It is the most reliable melon you can grow. Seed is available from Johnny’s Selected Seeds ([www.johnnyseeds.com](http://www.johnnyseeds.com)).

‘Early Silver Line’ is another variety of Asian melon that is more widely available (Seed Savers and Burpee offer it, among many seed companies). This is an heirloom variety that is early and productive, but its fruits are smaller and fewer in number; plus, its vines are especially sensitive to cucumber beetles. ‘Early Silver Line’ is okay, but ‘Sun Jewel’ is clearly better. DG

**NDSU**  
Extension Service

Written by Tom Kalb,  
Extension Horticulturist, NDSU  
[tom.kalb@ndsu.edu](mailto:tom.kalb@ndsu.edu)

Published December 2011

The following photo was made available under Creative Commons licenses specified by the photographer, allowing for adaptation, modification or building upon: “Yellow squash” by Dan Iggers, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/fortinbras/4923740547/>