

MOUSE MELON MANUAL

COMPLETE GUIDE
TO GROWING
CUCAMELONS

WRITTEN BY

Jacob Sager, 2021





**The Mouse Melon Manual or
The Cucamelon Companion:
How to Grow and Harvest *Melothria Scabra***
By Jacob Sager

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Dedication:

I dedicate this book to my daughter Shiraz, who loves the cucamelon fruit and plant and has aptly nick-named it as a “salad grape.”

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to my wife for the encouragement and support in my prolific experiments in gardening.

Thank you to my friend Collin Campbell, the true farmer. He answered hundreds of questions and listened to me dream about this plant. Thank you.

A special, nostalgic thank you to my science and theology teachers at St.Stephen’s Episcopal school in Austin, Texas for role-modeling a meaningful relationship with earth that inspires my gardening pursuit.

Thank you to OutsidePride for supplying me with thousands of excellent cucamelon seeds.

Thank you to the beloved plant species, *Melothria Scabra*, who has inspired my farming and the writing of this book.

Introduction

My name is Jacob and I live in central Texas with my wife and four children. For years we've been gardeners, tinkering with lucious foliage producing house plants and various delicious salad vegetables. In 2019, after two years of living in our home, we greatly expanded our garden. As we came into 2020 our plans were to grow enough cucumbers and tomatoes for the summer and fall to stop buying them at the store. They had become a staple of most meals with our young children and we thought it'd be a fun exercise in scale.

Our spring and summer crops were so prolific we grew tired of cucumbers and tomatoes. As I readied for fall 2020, I found some seeds at the plant nursery for "Mexican Gherkins or Mouse Melons." After a successful crop of ornamental cucumbers, I was inclined to grow the plant.

At first, I thought I had failed, as the plant as the seedlings were slow germinating and growing. Having planted in July, which was a bit late, there was scarce growth by August first, and vines but no fruit by september first. However, within the next week fruit appeared and the abundantly populated our plant through the first frost in late october. It was incredible.



The fruit was delicious and highly desirable to my picky children. I only wished we had planted more and planted sooner. I took the time to watch every youtube video, read every blog post, and find every vendor discussing this amazing fruit. Two things emerged: not a lot of people were talking about them, and those that were ate them fresh off the vine.

While the pursuit was informative, none of the resources available were comprehensive nor structured. So I decided to write this book. In this short volume, we will explore the process of growing Cucamelons. We will begin by expanding on the fruit species characteristics. Then we will elaborate on the plants' life cycle. While probing the plant's life cycle, we will cover how to garden and care for the plant, as well as harvest and prepare the fruit. The book will end with an FAQ and list of further resources.



Thank you for reading this book, please reach out with any questions or updates on your Mouse Melon plant. I can be found via instagram @salad_grapes or through the contact form at saladgrapes.com

Jacob Sager
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Species Information

Melothria Scabra is a vine native to Mexico and Central America cultivated for its grape-size fruit. It's a member of the Melothira Genus within the family Cucurbitaceae. It's fruit is quite literally a tiny melon. Looks like a watermelon, tastes like a zesty cucumber. It's native to Mexico and Central America and has been known to do well in temperate climates throughout the continents.



Melothria Scabra is known by a variety of names in english and in spanish.

- Cucamelon
- Mouse melon
- Mexican sour gherkin
- Mexican Miniature watermelon
- Sandita
- Sandita Raton
- Pepquinos

For the rest of the book the plant and its fruit will be referred to mostly as Cucamelons.

Plant Description

Melothria Scabra are slow growing vines that can reach up to 10 feet or longer. Seedlings may take up to a month to germinate as well as another month to begin secondary leafing. Within 6-8 weeks the plant is likely to grow more than five feet with many shoots. The fruit have a grape-like oblong flesh with a light and dark green body that is seed-heavy. Most seed companies suggest 70-75 days to harvest; however this is dependent on germination and other effects whilst growing. In some circumstances, overlapping sideshoots can produce dense cover. The plant will continue to produce fruit near where old fruit was picked while continuing to grow through it's main vine and sideshoots, producing more fruit. While specific plants may vary, most will produce fruit from maturity through the first frost.



Distinction from Cucumbers and Other Melons



Like cucumbers and tomatoes, Cucamelons are monoecious, meaning plants produce both male and female flowers. Flowers are tiny and yellow, fruits develop at the base of the female flower.

Unlike cucumbers, female flowers typically bloom before male flowers once the vines have grown more than a few feet.

Unlike cucumbers, Cucamelons can be grown as a perennial in some climates. The vines should be cut back and the rootstock/tubers should be stored in a dry environment

for the winter. Re-plant the tubers in spring as fresh seedlings.

Planting Cucamelons

Seeds

Cucamelons seeds are tiny and should be handled thoughtfully.

Seeds are typically available through popular seed outlets as well as top retailers.

Germination should happen within a week but could take up to four weeks.

They need full sun and loamy, well-drained soil.

Seeds should be planted a quarter inch deep.

They can be planted at a rate of 2-3 seeds per spot.

Cucamelons emerge best in a temperature of 70-75* F.



Cucamelons grow voraciously. Make space for the vines in every direction.

The main vine can grow upwards of 10 feet, side shoots can reach 6-8 feet.

When planting in rows keep plants at least 2 feet apart.

Seeds can be started

indoors 4-6 weeks before the last frost.

Cucamelons can be germinated and grown in any popular or conventional medium.

Growth Sponges are effective for germination but should be used by expert gardeners as Cucamelon roots are fragile. I personally do not have experience growing them hydroponically but there are YouTube videos of growers sharing their success.

Seedlings

Warmth is the key to successful Cucamelon germination.
Seeds emerge best in a soil on a warming pad with a humidity dome.



Seedlings will emerge slowly, at first displaying two leaves.
After 3-5 weeks, a third, [pointed] shape leaf will emerge.
Following which the growth head will emerge.

Sprouts

Once roots have emerged through the growing medium indoor plants can be transplanted.

Plants should be hardied outside for a few days before transplant to minimize shock.

Cucamelons grow very slowly at first. Vines are delicate but can be trained with direct intervention. Take caution when touching the growth head but be confident in directing it.

After the 6th week, Cucamelons begin vigorous growth. Tiny female flowers emerge before males. They should be grown on a trellis or fence, upward and outward but not down on the ground. If training the plant up a trellis, tend to the plant daily during the period of high growth.



Growing Cucamelons

Fertilizing:

Cucamelons can be fertilized at a similar rate to cucumbers.

A thoughtful nitrogen fertilization can be applied to seedlings by advanced gardeners. A typical cucumber or general fertilizer can be applied after secondary foliage appears. Fertilization can be applied weekly during high growth.



Watering:

Cucamelon seeds germinate best in a wet, warm and humid environment. Seedlings need moist soil but can easily die of shock from over or under - watering.

Rapidly growing plants require 3-4 inches of water a week.

Mature fruiting plants love the same amount of water but are also rather drought tolerant.



Training:

Cucamelon vines grow just like cucumbers and can be trained up poles, fences, and trellises. Cucamelon vines can be woven through chain-link or plant cages as they grow. Cucamelon tendrils can be easily trained and retrained around various sized objects. Cucamelon vines are best supported by a lattice structure of a fence, cage, or net.



Harvesting

Fruit Growth

Cucamelon fruits grow from the sack behind the female flowers. Fruits follow pollination. Fruits begin small and darkly monotone. Over a week fruit will expand and gain more color. Mature fruit is similar to a grape in size and shape. The fruit shines many shades of green.



Picking Fruit

Fruit can be harvested by hand from the vine. Dried flowers may remain on the end of the fruit. They are not harmful and can be removed. A simple pinching or twisting of the vine at the root of the fruit will break it free. Treat the fruiting vine thoughtfully and delicately, to support ongoing growth. The vines are tiny but strong, they can be retrained during growth and harvest.



Storing Fruit

Store fruit in a dry, cool place. Such as a refrigerator crisper or root cellar. Fruit can last a few days at room temperature before wilt and shrivel. Fruit can last in an unrefrigerated covered container for a few more days. Fruit can be pickled or canned using similar methods to cucumbers.



Cooking Fruit

Frankly, my family eats them raw or cut for a garden salad, so I know no recipes. However, there are many recipes on the internet. Enjoy!



Thank you for reading.

If you want access to cucamelon seeds, plants, and fruit, as well as info and community, please visit my site @

www.saladgrapes.com

Best,
Jacob Sager 2021