

GREEN INVESTMENT — old style

Can't Alope?

In December there were many alarming news stories about people dying from salmonella poisoning as a result of eating cantaloupe. What is it about cantaloupes that made them cause that? Well, to start with they have a high sugar content, lots of water and a low pH. Bacteria like that, and they welcome the shelter provided by their rough surface rind. These bacteria can get into the orange flesh once the cantaloupe is cut open...even introduced by the knife blade. Bruised areas and holes left by removing the stem can also provide access.



So, when growing them, raise the young melon off the ground to stay dry and separate from the soil. Also, avoid using manure fertilizers once they've set fruit. In the kitchen, wash them well and eat them soon after you cut them open.

I have fond childhood memories of this fruit being a late summer indulgence. The type I feasted on were 'Montreal Melons' and 'Oka Melons' both widely popular across north-eastern North America. Last year, in our garden, I wanted to grow these but was unable to find seeds in any of our catalogues. Likely, improvements in plant breeding have pro-

duced new varieties that replaced these Canadian stalwarts on the shelf, but not in my imagination. Undeterred, this year, I found a small nursery in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia that has the seeds. That catalogue tells of their persistent search for such seeds until finding them in an obscure nursery in Philadelphia! Hooray, the flickering flame of this heirloom was almost snuffed-out.

The original cantaloupe seems to have come from Armenia—the home of many melon types. Somehow it came to be grown in the Italian province of Cantaloupe from which it acquired the name—a little more exotic than the English term 'muskmelon'. This reminds me of a family road trip along the USA/Saskatchewan border. Looking out the car window, my wife was excited to see her first ever wild antelops. She alerted the kids to this novelty. I added to the excitement saying that it was even more unusual to see the Canadian subspecies of this animal—the CANTalope.

There are many varieties of these melons. One of the most popular is the 'Jenny Lind'. Its name was the result of a 19th Century marketing ploy. A Swedish international opera star was passing through Philadelphia and a local restaurant wanted to serve her the local melon. They did—she liked it—and her name became attached to that variety ever since...keep an eye out for the 'Taylor Swiftalope'—maybe a type with smooth, bacteria-free skins!

Now you may be reluctant to eat another cantaloupe but there's more to do with them than ingest them. I read that a tradition for the Chinese New Year (in 2024 February 10) is to slice them in one continuous spiral band and wear that wrapped about your body as a sort of scarf. It's supposed to bring good luck...which from those earlier news stories they don't always do. Maybe for next Chinese New Year I'll try that but mostly I look forward to going down memory lane with some Montreal and Oka varieties. I'll need to be vigilant in protecting these as sometimes heirloom varieties are susceptible to new plant diseases. Or they could fall victim to marauding rabbits. I'm going to try and train my inexhaustible border collie to guard these. She's been a little subdued lately since we no longer have sheep—perhaps she will find her inner 'melon-collie'.

I wonder if old-time, sea-fairing sailors ate these melons to ward off scurvy...the Rind of the Ancient Mariner!

- By Robin Reilly

At their Black River Forest Garden, the Reilly's raise many types of plants and animals within a larger project to restore a diverse meadow and forest landscape.

