Casaba Melons

- Casaba melons have a long history and have been grown for centuries in and around the Mediterranean Coast.
- In the mid to late 1800's seed found its way to sellers in the US.
- The casaba is a long season vine crop exceeding 90 days. When they were grown in the South, they were harvested in late October into November and sold into the North as Winter Melons.

Casaba Melons in Late September



Interest in these "Winter Melons"

- The original purpose for investigating growing these melons started with looking at crops that could have some longer shelf storage life.
- Being called "winter" melons, this was intriguing.
- With the expansion of seasonally local food and selling through winter CSA shares and winter and long-season markets, the wider the selection available would have greater customer appeal.

Observations

- Most of the varieties selected were ones found mentioned in old seed catalogs dating back to the late 1890s-1930.
- Several sources of seed with the same name were found. Growing them out for storage experiments was undertaken in 2013.
- They were grown following the same recommendations as for cantaloupe.

Field Observations

- 2013 was a cool wet season. The plot was direct seeded in mid June and germination was slow over two weeks.
- Trickle irrigation under black plastic mulch was in place. Preplant fertilizer had been added in May.
- Weeds were managed through the season but no insect or fungicide program was initiated.

Observations

- By late July, the plants started vining out after a slow start.
- Downy mildew blew into WNY in July yet the plants seemed to be slow in getting the disease.
- Late August saw DM show up on all the varieties trialed.
- Interestingly, the leaves did not show severe symptoms. Vines continued to grow and more fruit was set.

Observations

- Melons started ripening with a few in late August and continued through Sept. Most were ripened by the third week in Sept.
- All of the varieties seemed to be ready within 5-7 days of each other.
- Some were harvested to slice, taste, and characterize qualities.
- The rest were stored in a cooler with a temperature in lower 50'sF.

Piel de Sapo







- Good tolerance to DM
- Consistent large fruit
- 4+ fruit/vine
- Flavor is sweet and perfumey
- Hard at first to determine when to harvest.

 Doesn't have "slip" stem. Look for at least 2 dried tendrils and dulling of rind color.

Amarillo D'Oro







- Nice attractive color
- Good DM tolerance
- 3+ fruit/plant
- Great flavor
- Hard at first to determine when to harvest.

 Doesn't have "slip" stem. Look for at least 2 dried tendrils and dulling of rind color.

Valencia Winter





- Large fruit 3+lbs
- Good tolerance to DM
- Prolific production 5+ fruit/plant
- Hard rind
- Hard at first to determine when to harvest.

 Doesn't have "slip" stem. Look for at least 2 dried tendrils and dulling of rind color.

Verde de Inverno



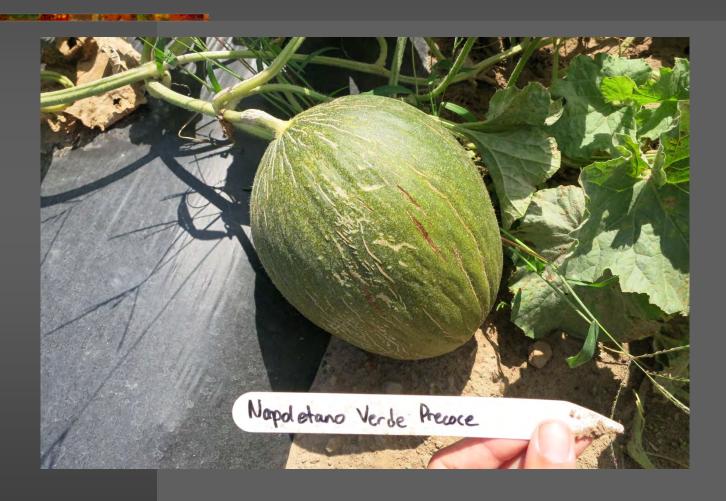




- Fair tolerance to DM
- A lot of fruit 4+/plant
- Fine flavor
- 2-2.5lb ea
- Hard at first to determine when to harvest.

 Doesn't have "slip" stem. Look for at least 2 dried tendrils and dulling of rind color.

Napoletano Verde







- Earliest to ripen
- Great flavor, fragrant
- Rounder fruit 2-2.5lb
- Very prolific 7+fruit/plant
- Fair tolerance to DM
- Hard at first to determine when to harvest.

 Doesn't have "slip" stem. Look for at least 2 dried tendrils and dulling of rind color.

Tendril Verde Tardif







- Hard rind
- Fair DM tolerance
- Prolific 4+ fruit/plant
- Great taste
- Hard at first to determine when to harvest.

 Doesn't have "slip" stem. Look for at least 2 dried tendrils and dulling of rind color.

Golden Beauty









- Poorest of group with DM but still had vine growth and green leaves in mid Sept.
- Yellowish rind with ring at bottom end.
- Poor taste
- Hard at first to determine when to harvest.

 Doesn't have "slip" stem. Look for at least 2 dried tendrils and dulling of rind color.

Additional comments

- The pictures of the harvested fruit show a greenish hue to most of the varieties. This has to do with not being able to figure out when to pick. Most were slightly under-ripe. Fruit harvested 5 days later were better. Looked for duller rind color and several dried tendrils closest to stem.
- Fully ripe fruit were cantaloupe orange to orangey-pink and very flavorful.
- Taste tested with farmers and all raved over the flavor.

Storage Trial

- Melons were stored in open boxes
- Melons were more mature than the ones in the pictures.
- 25% of fruit were softening after 2 weeks.
- 50% were soft after 3 weeks.
- 25% lasted 4 weeks with little decrease in rind hardness and flavor. Though dark spots were starting to appear on the rinds.
- Results store no longer than 14-18 days @ 36-40° F

Take Home Message

- Casaba melons have terrific flavor.
- Some of the varieties seem to stand up longer to DM than cantaloupe
- Some storage potential. Will be growing out more and selecting for types with longer storage life and breeding them out.