**The Perfect Summertime Snack: Cantaloupe**

Late summer is a favorite time for avid gardeners. Plants like cantaloupe have grown all summer and the day to harvest ripe cantaloupe has arrived!! Cantaloupe is high in nutrients and are easy to grow in home gardens. One cup of sliced cantaloupe contains 60.2 calories and only .336 grams of fat. Cantaloupes are also rich in vitamin A, and vitamin C!

Cantaloupes are grown in home gardens across the state, but the only commercial plantings are in the Wintergarden region. Cantaloupes need to be grown when temperatures are 70 degrees Fahrenheit or above. The ideal temperature for cantaloupe is 75-89 degrees Fahrenheit. There should be at least 110-140 frost-free days for cantaloupes to fully mature. It is best to plant about four to five months in advance to the first frost to have production in early fall.

If you would like to grow cantaloupe and are low on space, try growing it on a trellis similar to the photo. I’ve had great luck with growing vining plants on hog panel supported by a t-post. Be sure the structure you decide to use is strong. The plants can be quite heavy as they grow. Some folks support the fruit with pantyhose or another type of breathable fabric, but I’ve had good luck without support. The ripe melons will fall off the vine when they are ready to eat.

When selecting a cantaloupe from the store, you should look for a cantaloupe where the stem has slipped from the fruit, has yellowish skin, a fresh aroma, and a healthy outer rind that is free of cuts/damage. You should avoid cantaloupes that are mushy or leaking juice, have a damaged outer rind, and that are damaged where the stem was attached.

Next time you are out of healthy snack options and are craving something sweet, try a cantaloupe!

As always, please don’t hesitate to contact me if I can be of any assistance.

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