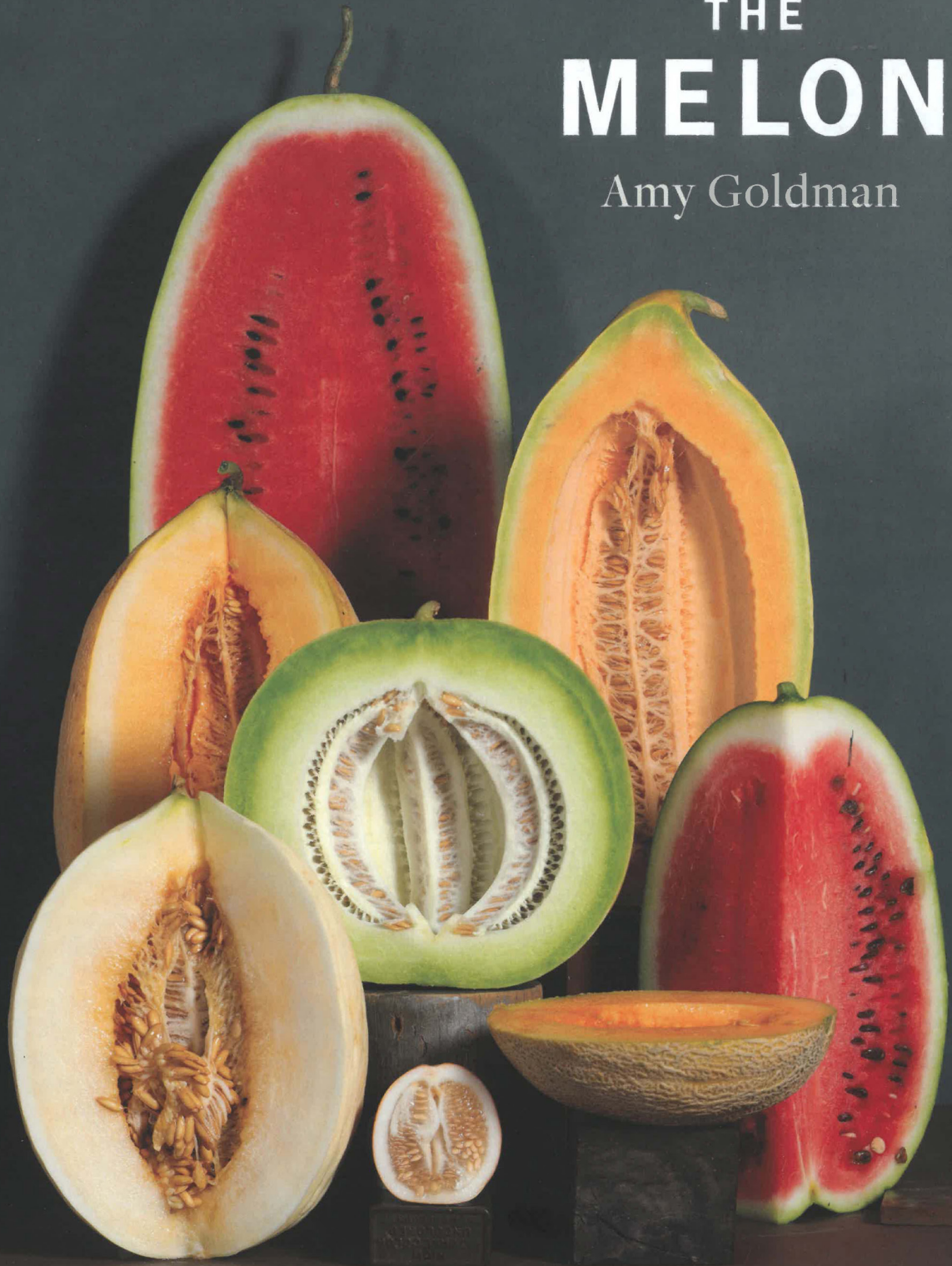


THE MELON

Amy Goldman



PHOTOGRAPHS BY VICTOR SCHRAGER

Book Review:

THE MELON by Amy Goldman

By Steffen Mirsky, Evaluation and Trials Manager

It is late August as I write this book review, and I'm full of anticipation—and trepidation—about this year's melon crop. Over the last eight years that I have evaluated melons from our collection, I have experienced, in roughly equal proportions, the sheer ecstasy of a successful crop and the crushing disappointment of crop failure. It's no easy feat growing heirloom melons in northeast Iowa, zone 4b. And this year, a dearth of the warm, sunny, dry days that melons need to thrive is causing my concern to grow by the day.

However, I am thrilled that Amy Goldman's newest book on the subject, *The Melon*, has just been published. In it, she brings to life hundreds of varieties of melons and watermelons with enticing prose, well-researched historical information, scientific observations, and stunning photography by Victor Schrager. A sequel to her *Melons for the Passionate Grower*, published in 2002, *The Melon* delves deeper into the crop, including information on its history, taxonomy, growing methods, and seed-saving practices. Most of the book is dedicated to profiles of individual melon and watermelon varieties with accompanying photographic portraits that arouse the eye and tantalize the palate. The varieties are organized into their horticultural classifications, from the familiar *Reticulatus* (muskmelon) and *Cantalupensis* (true cantaloupe) groups to types rarely grown in the United States, such as *Momordica* and *Khandalak*.

The diversity of the fruit is on full display throughout the book, including the blotchy, lightly netted rind and white, cotton candy interior of the 'Cob' melon and the tawny, leathery carapace of the behemoth 'Bidwell Casaba.' In the field of watermelons, the endearing, icebox variety 'Golden Midget' with its papaya-colored rind, salmon-pink flesh, and jet-black seeds contrasts with the statuesque, boldly striped, and thick-rinded 'Georgia Rattlesnake' watermelon.

The histories of the varieties are equally diverse, as Amy describes in detail. The 'Ha'ogen' melon is named after a kibbutz in Israel founded by Hungarian immigrant Natan Fuchs (1915-84), whose brother sent him seeds from Hungary in the 1940s. The green-fleshed, nutmeg-type melon 'Jenny Lind' was

introduced in the mid-1800s and named after the Swedish opera singer who was promoted to stardom in the United States by the showman P.T. Barnum around the same time. Its "outie" belly button at its blossom end was touted as a "delicious morsel" by Burpee Seed Co. in the early 1900s, helping it become a best-selling variety.



Of course, no discussion of melons would be complete without highlighting the diversity of their culinary uses. In her last chapter, Amy gives

us fresh ideas for their use in salads and starters, main dishes, drinks, and sweets. In each of these recipes, the melon is the star of the show, and she often recommends a specific variety, type, or color to use, a testament to the diversity of forms and uses of the crop. The Melon-Coconut Lassi with Pistachios and Pink Peppercorns, for example, is best made with 'Ha'ogen' or another green-fleshed melon. For the Lobster, Grilled Melon, and Watercress Salad, she recommends a "firm-ripe" 'Charentais' or other orange-fleshed melon. And her Melon, Farro, and Radish Salad with Fresh Mint and Dill calls for a white-fleshed 'Turkish' or 'Spanish Casaba' melon.

It is hard to read *The Melon* and not be inspired to grow many of these varieties. Whether you use it as a reference book, recipe book, coffee-table book, or all of the above, you're sure to gain a greater appreciation of this luscious fruit. And, should this year's melon crop at Heritage Farm not yield much "nectar of the Gods," at least I will have Amy's *The Melon* to feast my eyes upon. ♦

The Melon by Amy Goldman, photographs by Victor Schrager; published 2019 by City Point Press; www.citypointpress.com.