

GARDENER'S BOOKS: GARDENING THROUGH LIFE

The Melon

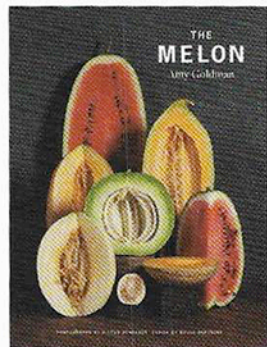
Amy Goldman (photographs by Victor Schrager). City Point Press, Westport, CT, 2019. 312 pages. Publisher's price, hardcover: \$50.

WITH SHORT, COOL summers and wet clay soil, my Vermont garden offers only one of the essentials melon cultivation requires:

lots of room. *Quel tragique*, a French gardener might say, for even a hasty glance at the fruits—85 melons and 40 watermelons—included in Amy Goldman's *The Melon* will have readers seeking a warm, sunny garden plot with well-drained, sandy loam.

While *The Melon* is large and lavishly illustrated enough to be considered a “coffee-table book,” that label would be a disservice because it is also informative, well-written, concise, and

clear—in fact, a first-rate reference book. Tucked between photographer Victor Schrager's gorgeous, seductive portraits of each melon are carefully researched variety descriptions and histories, advice on growing, primers on saving seeds and hand pollination, and a complete list of seed sources. There's even a thorough explanation of how to tell when melons are ripe, which reminds us that what you pick is what you get: Melons do not get sweeter off the vine.



Goldman trialed 125 melons over nine years on her Hudson Valley, New York, farm. All are stable open-pollinated (OP) varieties whose seeds breed true (produce plants identical to their parent). Most are also heirlooms and date back a century or more. Selected for particular traits—usually by gardeners in a specific region—their seeds have been faithfully handed down from one generation to the next.

Eagle-eyed readers may notice that some inclusions have far shorter histories. These varieties, such as the green-fleshed ‘Fordhook Gem’, are known as “created heirlooms,” stable OP varieties developed after 1945. (The year 1945 marks the year hybrids began to be widely used by farmers and home gardeners.)

In addition to throwing light on a favorite fruit, *The Melon* is also a plea for preserving heirloom and OP crops. Goldman is a long-time mainstay of Seed Savers Exchange (www.seedsavers.org), the preeminent seed preservation organization in North America. And who wouldn't want to save flavorful fruits with names like ‘Collective Farm Woman’ and ‘Hero of Lockinge’? Or ‘Georgia Rattlesnake,’ the variety Mark Twain may have had in mind when he wrote in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* that when one tastes a southern watermelon “he knows what the angels eat. It was not a Southern watermelon that Eve took; we know it because she repented.”

—Karan Davis Cutler

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