The melons are rolling in, and we are rolling in melons. Cantalopes, known as muskmelons, have one major purpose on the farm. They are a week-long diversion to keep us from picking unripe watermelons. Honey Rock is the variety of muskmelons I've chosen to save seed from. This season I only grew this one kind so that the seed would come true. Melons readily cross breed. Cantalopes don't cross with watermelons, but will cross with cucumbers. Notice the similarity in their seeds. I let the seeds sit in water for a few days to ferment before drying and storing them.

Cantaloupes are ripe when the stem easily slips off the melon. I push it with my index finger when I reach for the fruit. If it's tight I leave it. A ripe muskmelon , as the name suggests, has a powerful aroma. I could not have a more pleasant memory than sitting at the picnic table being served a perfectly ripe cantalope, and saving the seeds with dreams of the future. All our senses are engaged – sight, smell, taste, and touch, along with the music of birds and bees.

Ten days later we are bringing the watermelons in. the cantalopes are fleeting melons, they are here and suddenly gone. Watermelons last for over a month, sitting underneath a shady tree. You have to have plenty, though, because they get eaten often.

Melons are the only crop we grow on black plastic. I simply can't keep the weeds out otherwise, because we tromp the vines so much when hoeing. The wholes are a foot wide and several feet apart.

I prepare the field as I would for any of our other summer crops. The cover crop is mown, and then I fling tons of compost on to the field. Next, I rebrake it, then wait a few days and rebrake it again, following with a harrow. The soil has to have adequate lime for melons, and the other summer vegetables, to thrive.

We lay the plastic down and put slab wood on it to hold it in place. Each hole gets a shovelful of compost mixed in, and a dozen seeds are fingered in, pressed tight, and covered with loose soil. They're up within a week. This year the patch was planted during the last week of May.

The hills are tickled enough to keep the weeds out and the soil happy, and 90 days later we're happy, too. We thump them, look for a white spot underneath, feel them for ribs, check the tendril opposite of where the stem connects, and even lay a piece of hay on them to see if it spins.

A touch with the knife is the real test, and a loud "crack" as the melon splits in half lets you know they're ripe. Black Diamond, Crimson Sweet, Charleston Gray, Tendersweet and Jubilee are the varieties we have this year, about a truckload of each. I'd love to tell you which one is the best.

The last three, being oblong, stack better on the truck and under the tree. Jubilee produces more real big ones, , the crimson sweets are smaller and have smaller seeds. We drop a few tossing them out of the field, trying to stop lightly, but it's nothing to cry about (until we realize we're all carrying an extra one in our bellies).

The piece I just ate was a charleston gray, and, like most pieces I just ate, is the best I've ever had. But our first this summer was a black diamond, she was a jubilee, tender and crimson sweet.