

URBAN FARMER

LOVE THE EARTH

Common pests and diseases: Melons

When growing vegetables, it is always exciting to care for the plant throughout its growing phase and then harvest it for delicious recipes later on, but one thing to watch out for is pests and diseases. Different plants are susceptible to different types of pests and diseases, and it is important to make yourself aware so you can keep a watchful eye and also take any preventative methods to keep your plants safe throughout their lifespan.

Melons can fall victim to several different pests and diseases.

Pests:

Insects affecting melon plants include aphids, squash beetles, pickleworms and cucumber beetles.

Aphids are soft-bodied insects that bring problems to lots of plants. They create discoloration of the leaves, necrotic spots and stunted growth. Use tolerant varieties and only apply insecticides if there's a high infestation.

Squash beetles affect all sorts of cucurbits and will feed on the leaves of the plant. It can overwinter in crop debris. To manage this insect, use pyrethrin or neem oil extract.

Pickleworms are damaging to several types of cucurbits, but when it comes to melons, it most commonly affects cantaloupes and watermelons. The caterpillars will tunnel into the flower, buds, stems or fruit of the plant. When a fruit has been damaged, it is not edible, and sometimes, the damage isn't noticed until the fruit is cut open. To prevent



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this, plant as early as possible in the season and destroy damaged fruit. To treat this insect, use applications of *Bacillus thuringiensis*, pyrethrin, neem oil extract or Spinosad.

Cucumber beetles are spotted yellow beetles that cause stunted seedlings and damaged leaves, as well as plants exhibiting signs of bacterial wilt and scars the melons. These beetles will overwinter in the soil. To prevent them, use floating row covers, apply kaolin clay and if necessary, use an insecticide.

Diseases:

Some of the most common diseases affecting melons, specifically watermelons, include anthracnose, *Alternaria* leaf spot, powdery mildew and more.

Anthracnose will cause small, dark spots on crown leaves after the vines begin to run. This disease can be seedborne and it can affect all but the youngest leaves.



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Treat seeds, practice crop rotation and utilize the appropriate fungicides to prevent this disease.

Alternaria leaf spot causes round or irregular lesion on older leaves. This disease prefers wet conditions, and it is a fungus. It can be controlled by practicing crop rotation, destroying all crop debris after harvest and applying the appropriate fungicides.

Powdery mildew is also a fungus affecting melons, and it causes a white or gray dusty material on the upper surface of the leaves. It spreads to cover the entire leaf, which then kills the leaf. This disease prefers high humidity, and it is best treated by applying the appropriate fungicides as soon as you notice a problem. This disease usually occurs on older leaves first, and it typically appears later on in the growing season.

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