SEEDED AND SEEDLESS WATERMELON VARIETY TRIAL

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This trial evaluated seeded and seedless watermelons in order to determine which varieties grow best in Kentucky. Relatively new to the market are seedless, orange fleshed watermelons that, along with yellow seedless watermelons, are slowly becoming more available, and taste much like the traditional red fleshed varieties.

Materials and Methods

Seeds of 18 seedless and 6 seeded watermelon varieties were planted in cell packs on April 27. The trays were then placed onto a bench with bottom heat in a warm greenhouse. Germination rates were recorded and the plants were thinned to one plant per cell using scissors. On May 31, the plants were set into raised, black plastic mulched beds, with a waterwheel setter. Six plants were spaced 4’ apart within the row and rows were spaced 10’ apart. Each plot was replicated 3 times, with 8 feet between cultivars. Drip irrigation was used to fertigate and irrigate as needed.

Nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium were applied preplant to the fields as warranted by soil tests. Two replications out of the three received 150 lbs/A each of phosphate and potash, and 225 lbs/A of ammonium nitrate. The third replication received 150 lbs/A of phosphate and 225 lbs/A of ammonium nitrate. A total of 60 lbs/A of ammonium nitrate was fertigated over four applications throughout the season. Irrigation was halted 4 weeks prior to the estimated harvest time to raise the sugar content of the melons. Admire 2F, a systemic insecticide, was applied to the planting hole immediately after setting the plants at the rate of 24 fl. oz. per acre. Other foliar insecticides and miticides applied during the growing season included Sevin, Pounce, Asana, and Kelthane. The fungicides Bravo and Quadris were used for disease control. Insect and disease scouting was used to help determine pesticide application timing. Curbit was applied and incorporated into the ground between beds prior to vine cover.

Results and Discussion

During planting and the week following, the weather was unseasonably cold and wet. About half of the plants showed transplant stress and grew slowly the first week. Although vine coverage was heavier than in past years, yield was slightly lower.

Seeded Watermelons
The best performing seeded watermelons in the trial were Stars N’ Stripes, Sangria, Athens and Mara. Stars N’ Stripes, a large, oblong melon with a distinct mottled rind had the highest yield. Sangria has been an excellent variety in past years and there is a tendency for the fruit to be slightly narrow at one end. Athens and Mara also performed very well and Mara had very large
fruit.

**Seedless Watermelons**
The best performing seedless red watermelons were Millionaire, Triple Prize, Revolution, RWT 8096 and Ultra Cool. Millionaire was the highest yielding and is an excellent round seedless melon with an average sugar content. Triple Prize has performed very well in the past and has an exceptional taste. It had some hollow heart. Revolution, an elongated, seedless melon, had an excellent taste and yield.

The best performing orange fleshed seedless watermelon was Orange Sweet. Its flavor and yield were good but Orange Sweet had more seeds than we would like to see.

Treasure Chest was the best yellow fleshed seedless watermelon.