

Eco-Culture A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MONTREAL MELON

The original French settlers of the New World quickly discovered that a particular region between the St. Lawrence River and Mount Royal of the Montreal plain was an ideal location for cultivating melons. Much of this area later became farmland owned by the Décarie family and the major expressway that currently crosses the region bears this name. The two most notable melons cultivated in the region were the Montreal Muskmelon (aka Montreal nutmeg melon) and the Décarie Melon and they became well-known throughout the eastern parts of the US and Canada for a period from the late 19th century until the Second World War. Montreal melons were larger than any others cultivated in North America at the time. Its light green flesh and spicy flavor reminiscent of nutmeg made it a highly sought after delicacy. At one point in time, a single slice of Montreal Melon was sold in fine New York and Boston restaurants at the same price as a premium-quality steak.

The continued growth of the city of Montreal and the associated urbanization of farmland that accompanied this growth led to the virtual disappearance of these two wonderful melon varieties. The Décarie Melon, in fact, no longer exists. The Montreal Muskmelon disappeared for more than sixty years until 1996 when Mark Abley, a reporter for a Montreal newspaper working on an article about these lost melon varieties, located some Montreal muskmelon seeds in a U.S. Department of Agriculture seed bank in Iowa. The seeds were brought back to Montreal and given to an organic farmer, Dr. Ken Taylor of Ile-Perrot, Quebec, who succeeded in reviving this lost treasure. The seeds that are provided with this growing kit have been cultivated on Ken Taylor's Windmill Point Farm outside of Montreal.