

MY MELONS ARE FROM MARS

Just the other day, as I walked through the melon patch, I took note of the extraordinarily rapid growth of the cantaloupe. It seemed as though the golf ball size young fruit had grown to bowling ball size overnight. It seemed so unusual that I had to pull out the seed packet to review the variety I had planted.

While the seed packet for the ‘Venetian Wonder’ cantaloupe didn’t look out of the ordinary, when I turned it over, I saw that the seed came from the Intergalactic Seed Co. in Starstruck, Washington. Adding to the mystery, I don’t recall ever buying the seed variety, ‘Venetian Wonder’. How, then, did I come into possession of this particular seed packet? Just to the right of the seed producer’s name, I saw an icon of a little green man dressed in gardening attire.

Inside the seed packet, I found a printed sheet of paper giving planting instructions. Of course, I never read the instructions because I’m a man and didn’t feel it necessary to read such instructions. I’ve been planting cantaloupe for nigh on twenty years. What could they possibly tell me that I don’t

already know? Still, given the current situation, I took it upon myself to see what the other ‘experts’ might have to say, considering my discovery.

The instructions appeared to be the run-of-the-mill statements of common sense that only a fool would ignore anyway. At the bottom of page three, I noted that the recommended planting time for maximum growth and fruit production was between April 1st and May 10th when the planets of Venus and Mars are horizontally aligned beneath the moon in the western sky. Needless to say, I found that a little strange. As I recall, though, that did coincide with the time that I planted them.

When the following morning arrived, the cantaloupe already showed signs of being ready to harvest. Further research that day on the internet into the Intergalactic Seed Co. showed no digital footprint whatsoever. I pulled out the seed packet again to see if I had missed anything. I don’t know how I could have missed it before, but my wife said she knew how. There it read in black and white, “There are two strains of ‘Venetian Wonder’ cantaloupe. If your melons show undo speed in growth and maturity, it is possible that you may have the rarer strain that was discovered by a breeder with

classified clearance. We can make no guarantee on this strain.”

My cantaloupe certainly seemed to fit the description of the rarer strain, but curiosity had me going back over the complete crop history from planting to what appeared to be time to harvest. Previous years’ cultivation of melons always involved a lot of monitoring and spraying for pests and disease, but I did nothing with this crop of melons. This amazing crop with its rapid growth, early harvesting, and complete lack of infestation by pests and disease left me with a dilemma. Do I share my experience with my neighbors and friends or not? I can hear it all now.

“Sure, Bob. Sure, sure. We believe you, Bob.”

I could not offer chronological proof of any kind in the crop’s progression, but merely the end product. Nobody else’s melons are even remotely ready for harvest. Perhaps I should say nothing and leave the crop as a testament to my extraordinary gardening skill or even do a little story enhancement. No, I’ve probably told too many fishing tales for that to be credible. I shall have to give considerable thought to the problem.

As I previously mentioned, I found no digital footprint for Intergalactic Seed Co., so I decided to call the United States Department of Agriculture to see if they had ever heard of either them or the ‘Venetian Wonder’ variety of Cantaloupe. After about twenty minutes of staying on hold with a fiddling tune repeating about every minute and being told about fifteen times how important my call was to them, I finally got a human voice. But it was merely a recording telling me to leave a message and they would get back to me in 5 to 10 business days. So, I left my message and went to harvest my melons. Before I got out the door, though, the phone rang, and a senior agricultural agent came on the line.

“Mr. Smith, this is senior agent Brad Barnes from the Department of Agriculture. I understand you have a seed packet from the Intergalactic Seed Co. that you wished to inquire about.”

“Yes, Agent Barnes,” I answered. “You see, I ...”

“I’m sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Smith, but is there a code on the back of the seed packet?”

Turning the packet over, I read off the code. “It’s 75643219.”

The phone went eerily quiet. Finally, I asked, “Agent Barnes, are you there? Did you get that number?”

“Yes, uh ... uh ... uh,” stammered Agent Barnes. “Mr. Smith, may I send someone out to your place this afternoon to see the melons?”

“Certainly,” I replied. “I’ll be here all day.”

About two o’clock that afternoon, a big black SUV pulled into my drive and four men dressed in hazardous waste-type suits got out and approached me in the garden.

“Mr. Smith,” said the apparent leader of the group. “Special Agent Tom Witherspoon. My boss, Senior Agent Barnes, said we could inspect your cantaloupe.”

“Sure, the melon patch is right over there.”

“Thank you, Mr. Smith, for your cooperation. We just have to inspect the melons, the vines, and the roots, and maybe take a few samples.”

After about an hour of examination and consultation, Agent Witherspoon started to walk over to me. Then one of the group members called him back over for further consultation. Finally, he came up to me.

“Sir, may we cut into one of your melons?” he asked.

“Yeah, I guess so,” I answered.

After cutting open the fully ripe melon, they passed a meter of some kind over it. It could have been a Geiger counter. More consultation, perhaps a little more animated, among the group members continued for about another thirty minutes.

“Mr. Smith,” said Agent Witherspoon. “We have concluded our investigation and we must, respectfully ask, that you not speak of these melons to anyone else.”

“What’s going on?” I asked.

“I’m not at liberty to discuss the details, but I can say it is a classified matter of utmost importance. There has been a breach in the security surrounding it. I’m afraid I’m going to have to confiscate that seed packet and any seed in it.”

“Okay. Let me go into the shed and get it.”

One of the four men accompanied me into the shed. I retrieved the packet and gave it to Agent Witherspoon.

“Here you go, Agent Witherspoon.”

“Thank you, Mr. Smith. I’m also afraid to tell you that we will have a crew here in about a half hour to clear out this melon patch. We will fairly compensate you for your crop loss.”

I stood there, dumbfounded. Barely able to even get out, “Everything?”

They came and removed every last melon, leaf, and root from my melon patch. While I received a generous payment for my melon patch, the whole experience left a little gap in my, at times, skeptical mind. I couldn’t help but contemplate the details that were beyond my ‘need to know’. The most reasonable conclusion seemed to be that of a top-secret project involving genetic modification. Maybe some lab assistant got bored and slipped the seed out just to see what would happen.

Well, I don’t buy it. Let’s look at the evidence on the seed packet—Intergalactic Seed Co. of Starstruck, Washington. Why would a government secret project want to assign such a controversial name to the packet at the risk of drawing panic among the masses? Then there’s the variety name ‘Venetian Wonder’—a rather clever attempt to confuse by a reference to Venice, Italy. It could be code for the origin as actually the planet Venus, but everybody knows that cantaloupe don’t grow on

Venus. Perhaps they are trying to draw attention away from the planet Mars. The planting instructions clearly gave a planting time in reference to the alignment of the two planets. Then there is the little green man in gardening attire on the seed packet. Hollywood, which could possibly know more than what we think, has depicted little green men from Mars in dozens of TV shows and movies.

I believe the evidence points to the conclusion that my melons are from Mars. You are certainly free to disagree with me on this, but I have seen too many shows about shadow governments to deny it.

I suppose I shouldn't have slipped three of those seeds into my pocket before I gave the packet to Agent Witherspoon, but those ... but those ... those were my melons from Mars.