What a beautiful watermelon – my mouth was watering in anticipation !!!

BUT

It was not to be!  Not this year, maybe next!!

(always a gardener’s hope, isn’t it?)

Why not this year?

*It depends* (a Master Gardener’s opening line):

Let’s start with the seeds. They should be kept dry and cool. They had to travel a long way just to reach the UGC. Any number of weather conditions could have impacted them along their travels. They could have been frozen, they could have been ‘cooked’ or they could have gotten wet. After they arrived, they were cared for, but no one knows what happened to them before they arrived at the UGC.

Let’s talk about their germinating conditions. The instructions provided were:

**How to Grow**

In northern areas, sow seed 4 weeks prior to last frost date. Sow seed directly into peat pots filled with soilless mix that has been well-watered and allowed to drain. Cover with media and maintain 75°F. Wrap in plastic to maintain uniform moisture. Germination will occur in 7 to 14 days. Keep warm, transplant after soil and air temperatures warm or protect from cool night temperatures. In areas with long growing seasons, seed may be sown directly into prepared garden soil.
Although we are not in a northern area, we choose to sow the seeds into a peat pot. The soilless mixture was not previously watered and allowed to drain. We did not cover the media. Instead we set the pots outside in the direct (hot) sun with sporadic irrigation. We did not maintain a 75 degree temperature; we exceeded it – every day! We did not maintain uniform moisture – in fact sometimes we gave them none! The seeds were exposed to extreme temperature and drought. In spite of our best efforts to set them up for failure, 50% of these seeds germinated! Amazing!

Growing on:
In general, after seeds have germinated, they like a cooler growing environment to grow some true leaves and to establish roots. However, these little guys were given no such care. They were left in the hot sun with ‘some’ irrigation to tough it out. They did! A full 100% (of the 50% that germinated) made it to transplant. These are tough guys! I still had hoes was still hopeful for a mouth watering taste!

Transplant:
The little plants (barely more than seedlings) with a minimal root system were transplanted into the ground on Apr 24. I said ‘good bye’ to them as I transplanted them into the ground. Why did I say ‘good bye’? Because they were being transplanted into the harshest conditions possible: Transplanted in hot Hawaii sun mid day, rather than the evening when they would have had a small chance of acclimating, the ground was heavy, heavy clay (rather than the sandy soil watermelon prefer), they had no benefit of any kind of shade and would not get enough moisture for seedlings. Imagine my surprise when there was ONE plant still struggling to survive after one week! I could not believe it!!! However, after one more week, even the last survivor gave up the battle.

Failure? Success? A learning experience? It’s all part of gardening. Living and learning and dying and learning and hoping for another chance!

What could we learn? Many things: follow the germination instructions, provide proper irrigation, choose a better site for the plant, grow a healthier plant before transplanting, transplant with protection from the hot Hawaii sun or perhaps direct seed into the ground, saving the plant transplant shock.
This is what we hope to taste next season, after lessons learned from the current season:

'Faerie' is a non-traditional watermelon in that it has a creamy yellow rind with thin stripes yet still yields sweet pink-red flesh with a high sugar content and crisp texture. Home gardeners will like growing something unique in their garden and the fact that the vines are vigorous yet spread only to 11' means it takes up less space in the garden. Each 7-8" fruit weighs only four to six pounds making it a perfect family size melon. Professional growers will appreciate the disease and insect tolerance as well as the prolific fruit set that starts early and continues throughout the season.