

Eggplant

Eggplant is a very cold-sensitive vegetable plant in the potato family (Solanaceae). There are dozens of types of eggplant. Standard eggplant varieties produce tear-shaped, glossy purple-black fruit 6 to 9 inches long. The long, slender, Japanese eggplant has a thinner skin and a more delicate flavor. Warm to hot weather throughout the season is necessary for good production.

Planting:

Transplant after danger of frost, when soil is thoroughly warm. Use 8 to 10 week old transplants. Plant in fertile garden soil that has been improved with organic matter. Space plants 24" apart in the row with rows spaced 30" to 36" apart. Fruits will be ready to harvest 55 – 80 days from transplanting.

Cultivation:

- **Fertilizing** - Eggplant is a heavy feeder. Sidedress with ½ lb. 10-10-10 or equivalent per 10 feet or row after the first fruits form.
- **Watering** - Black plastic mulch with a soaker hose or drip system underneath can greatly increase yield and hasten maturity. Though eggplants do well in hot weather, they must have well-drained soil.
- **Weeding** - Maintain a weed-free bed by using a mulch to cover the soil. Black plastic mulch will increase yields.
- **Special Directions** - Warm to hot weather throughout the season is necessary for good production. Cold

temperatures will stop plant and root growth, reducing plant vigor and yields, and increase vulnerability to flea beetle injury. Encouraging early, rapid root and top growth is critical to obtaining high yields. Floating row covers and other protective devices can help promote growth during variable spring weather, and protect plants from damaging flea beetles. When plants are 12 inches tall, nip back the growing tip to encourage branching. Support plants with cages or trellis to prevent lodging (plants falling over).

Harvesting:

Cut fruit stems with a sharp knife when fruit is not yet fully mature, about two-thirds of maximum size. Skin should be very glossy. When the side of the fruit is pressed slightly with thumbnail and an indentation remains, the fruit is ripe. Discard over-ripe fruit of dull color with brown seeds. Mature fruit should not be left on the plant as this will reduce overall productivity.

Storage and Preservation:

Medium cool (45° - 50°F), moist (90% RH) conditions; 1 week

Nutrition:

Good source of fiber

Preparation & Use:

Rinse, cut into pieces and sauté, or cook with other vegetables. Eggplant often substitutes for meat in ethnic dishes.

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