

How to grow eggplant

Eggplant (*Solanum melongena*)

Family: Solanaceae (Nightshade)

Season: Warm

Ease of growing: Moderate

Fertility needs: Medium

Water needs: Medium

Common propagation: Transplant

Seed facts

Germination temperature: 60°F to 95°F

Germination time: 14 to 21 days

Viability: 6 to 10 years

Transplants

Weeks to grow transplant: 8 to 10

Start: April

Plant out: June

Planning facts

Spacing: 18" to 24" in 24" 36" rows

Plants per square foot: 0.5

Days to harvest: 65 to 80 days from transplanting

Variety selection

The most popular varieties available offer glossy, deep purple fruits that are usually plum-shaped. Other varieties include white colored and white with purple speckles. Eggplants are indeterminate.

Preparation and planting

Eggplant loves hot weather and will produce the best crop in a long, hot summer. They are more sensitive to cold temperatures than either tomatoes or peppers. Temperatures below 50°F will harm the plants, and any frost will kill them.

Also, the fruit won't set when temperatures dip below 60°F. Soil requirements are the same as for tomatoes and peppers, but eggplant does not do as well on heavy soils.

Care

Eggplant growth can be improved with the use of black plastic mulches and protective row covers which also reduce insect problems. Mulches also conserve moisture and improve weed management. Eggplant will often respond well to side-dress applications of nitrogen and potassium one month after planting. Avoid overhead irrigation to prevent disease development. In windy exposed areas, support eggplants with stakes to avoid broken stems.

Major pests

Insects: Flea beetles, cutworms, Colorado potato beetle, mites, tarnished plant bug, whiteflies.

Diseases: Septoria leaf spot, early and late blight, anthracnose, Fusarium and Verticillium wilts, bacterial canker, tobacco mosaic virus.

Harvesting and storage

Many gardeners will delay the harvest until most of the fruits are nearly mature size (one to five pounds each). This way, the entire crop can be harvested in only a few weeks. Eggplant cannot be preserved by freezing or canning, so it is better to try to extend the picking season by harvesting fruit when they reach 3 to 5 inches. These immature fruits are the tenderest and the highest quality. Select fruit with a glossy skin. A dull sheen means it is past its prime. Examine the seeds; dark seeds mean lower quality. Harvested fruit may be held up to one week at 50°F and high humidity.

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