



Eggplant

Crow Wing County Master Gardeners *Giving Gardens* Guide to Eggplant

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Based on Information from U of M Extension horticulturalist Cindy Tong

DESCRIPTION

Eggplants are a member of the nightshade family, a relative of tomatoes, peppers and potatoes. They are a short season vegetable, need warm conditions and will not thrive during a cool season. Eggplants are usually deep purple or purple-black in color.

PLANT SITE REQUIREMENTS

Sun	Full Sun - six plus hours of sun daily
Soil	Soil pH between 5.5 and 7.5 is best. Unless the soil test recommends additional phosphorous, use a low- or no- phosphorous fertilizer. Too much nitrogen fertilizer will lead to plants that are bushy, leafy and slow to bear fruit. Soil could be improved by adding well-rotted manure or compost in spring or fall. Covering the planting area with black plastic mulch will warm the soil and reduce root damage during the planting.

PLANT SELECTION

- If plants are purchased from a garden center, choose sturdy plants. The stems should be at least the diameter of a pencil and leaves spaced closely together along the stems
- Days to Maturity - 55 to 70 days after planting, depending upon variety.

PLANTING RECOMMENDATIONS

- Start eggplant seeds about eight weeks before planting outdoors.
- Seeds should be planted one-fourth inch deep, in container cells with sterile, soilless germinating mix which is at least 70 degrees F.
- Monitor potting mix moisture to keep it evenly moist during germination.
- Provide bright overhead light for the seedlings so that the stems do not lean over.
- Reduce watering when plants are about five inches tall, then gradually expose plants to the outdoors, in a protected area, allowing a few hours of sunlight each day for 10 to 14 days.
- Bring indoors if nighttime temperatures drop below 55 degrees.
- Choose a location where you have not grown tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, eggplant or tomatillos for the past three to four years.
- Space plants 24 inches apart, in rows 30 to 36 inches apart.
- Night time temperatures should be consistently above 50 degrees.
- Transplant in late afternoon or on a cloudy, calm day.
- Water plants well before transplanting and install plant supports at time of planting

MAINTENANCE

Watering - Consistent soil moisture levels will produce the best quality fruit. Avoid overhead sprinkling as wet leaves are more disease prone. Soak the soil thoroughly at least once per week if there is less than one inch of rain, very sandy soil may require watering more often. Light watering may promote shallow root development and increase the plant's vulnerability to drought stress during hot weather.

Weeds - Frequent shallow cultivation with a garden hoe or trowel will kill weeds. After soil temperature has reached 75 degrees, mulch with grass clippings, straw or other organic, chemical free material to a depth of 3 to 4 inches to prevent weed growth and provide a clean, dry surface for the fruit to rest upon, preventing rot.

Diseases & Insects – Eggplants are vulnerable to some of the same diseases which affect tomatoes, potatoes, peppers and ground cherries. Early blight can affect eggplant. Verticillium can cause yellowing and wilt in eggplant. Cutworms chew stems at the soil line, leaving the severed tops uneaten. Colorado potato beetles can destroy eggplants; regularly check for orange egg masses on the undersides of leaves. Flea Beetles can weaken plants and hurt fruit growth.

Questions or Problems – For assistance in diagnosing an unknown problem, visit the University of Minnesota Extension diagnostic site “What’s Wrong with my plant?” <http://www.extension.umn.edu/garden/diagnose/>

HARVEST & STORAGE

- Harvest eggplants when they have reached mature size, clipping them off with sharp shears. Skins are still shiny and fruit is firm.
- Late in season, cover plants if low temperatures are forecast.
- Eggplants will keep about one week in the refrigerator
- Although most gardeners do not consider this a good method of preservation, you may blanch and freeze sliced eggplant

Eggplant Parmesan

Ingredients

3 eggplant	2 eggs, beaten
4 cups Italian seasoned breadcrumbs	16 oz. mozzarella cheese, shredded
½ cup Parmesan cheese	6 cups spaghetti sauce
½ tsp dried basil	

Instructions

1. Slice eggplant into ¼ to ½ inch rounds. Place on draining rack or layers of paper towel. Sprinkle both sides lightly with salt. Allow eggplant to sit and release moisture for up to 2 hours.
2. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Dip eggplant in egg, then in bread crumbs. Fry in oil and place in a single layer on paper towel-lined baking sheet.
3. Spread spaghetti sauce to cover the bottom of a 9 by 13 inch baking dish. Place a layer of eggplant slices in the sauce. Sprinkle with mozzarella and Parmesan cheeses. Repeat with remaining ingredients, ending with the cheeses. Sprinkle basil on the top.