

Eggplant

Solanum melongena



A beautiful, tropical addition to the Nightshade family, eggplant needs a long, hot season to set fruit. Offering fruits in colors of dark purple, lavender and white, eggplants are sure to add a special treat in containers and garden. They are extremely sensitive to temperatures below 55°F and are best protected until the weather warms up.

SITE REQUIREMENTS

Eggplants require full sun, at least 7 hours of direct sun, and rich, well-drained soil. Prepare the planting area by mixing 2-3" of composted manure and lime into the top 4-6" of the soil. Mix in an all-purpose granular fertilizer and lime in the bottom of each planting hole.

PLANTING

You can start seeds indoors mid February through March, 6-8 weeks before desired transplanting date. Sow seeds ¼" deep and cover with a fine layer of soil. Bottom heat will help them spout faster. Transplant seedlings into 4" pots when they have two sets of true leaves. Harden off your seedlings two weeks before desired transplanting date.

Eggplants thrive in warm, dry weather and are best planted outdoors late May through June when soil helps to warm the soil first by covering the planting area with 1-2" of compost, plastic mulch or cold frame. Eggplant growth is stunted by temperatures below 55°F, so it is best to protect new plants with a cold frame, cloche or cozy coat product until temperatures are consistently warmer. Set out plants 12-18" apart in rows 2-3' apart. Water in new plants with liquid seaweed or B1.

Keep new beds well weeded and slightly moist. You can cover new plantings with floating row cover for 3-4 weeks to prevent flea beetles and other insects. Plastic or organic mulches can help heat the soil, retain moisture and prevent blight. It also helps to stake your plants to help support heavy fruit.

WATER REQUIREMENTS

How much water your plants will require depends on the soil and weather. Eggplants are somewhat drought tolerant, but yield best with a steady supply of moisture. Weekly slow, deep (2-3 gallons) waterings are ideal. Drip irrigation is the best way to provide even moisture and while having fewer disease issues.

FERTILIZING

Eggplants are heavy feeders and benefit from having an all-purpose fertilizer added to each planting hole. Fertilize eggplants every two weeks with a mild liquid fertilizer once the fruits begin to appear.

HARVESTING & STORAGE

Harvest when fruit has reached mature size and the skin is smooth and shiny. Over-ripe fruit will be soft with dark seeds. Cut fruit from plant with knife or clippers, and watch for thorns on plants. Eggplants can store in the refrigerator 7-12 days. Roasted eggplant freezes well.

PESTS & DISEASES

Good gardening practices such as crop rotation, drip irrigation, proper planting time, floating row covers and removal of entire plants when harvest is done all help prevent many pests and diseases.

*Cutworm can often mow down all new transplants in one night. Spinosad is an organic control for cut worms.

*Snails and slugs leave large holes in leaves or eat new transplants when they feed at night. They often leave iridescent trails on leaves and the ground. Slug baits and beer traps are just two ways to control them.

*Flea beetles chew dozens of tiny holes in the leaves. For prevention cover new seed beds with floating row cover until plants are 8" tall. Dust with diatomaceous earth or spray with pyrethrin.

*Potato beetles will skeletonize leaves. They are orange and black striped beetles. They can be controlled with Rotenone, pyretherin and Spinosad.

*Spider mite damage appears as many, white pin sized dots all over leaves, or yellowing leaves. Tiny red mites will be on the under sides of leaves and webbing may be present along the main veins. Spider mites are most prevalent in hot dry weather. Spray with insecticidal soap three times at 7 day intervals. Predatory mites, Cimmamite and pyrethrins are also effective.

*Early blight begins as dark brown spots ringed in yellow. The fungus overwinters in the soil and infection can be greatly reduced by using plastic mulch and avoiding over head irrigation. Pick off infected areas and spray with copper or Serenade to help reduce the spread of the fungus.

*Tobacco mosaic virus appears as yellow, mottled, deformed leaves. There is no cure. Remove and destroy infected plants.

*Late blight is common in the cool wet conditions of spring. It appears as dark spots on leaves and stems which grow quickly. Plastic mulch and avoiding over head irrigation will greatly reduce the spread of this fungus which over winters in the soil. Copper and Serenade can help slow the spread of the fungus.

*Verticillium wilt first appears as yellowing leaves on one side of a stem. Cross sections of the stems near the base of the plant will show interior discoloring. There is no cure, remove and destroy infected plants. Replant in a new area.

*Blossom end rot appears as brown spots on the end of the fruit. It is caused by a lack of calcium availability or water stress. Adding lime to the soil before you plant and providing consistent moisture can prevent the problem. Calcium sprays can also help.

VARIETIES

* Black Beauty-73-80 days. Classic dark purple, almost round fruits. Heavy, reliable yields.

*Casper-70 days to maturity. Early producer of white, 5-6" oblong fruits. White, mild flesh has a juicy mushroom-like flavor. Great for cooler climates.

*Dusky-80 days to maturity. Deep purple, 8-9" long, round fruits. Good variety for shorter season areas. Disease resistant.

*Hansel-70 days to maturity. Dark purple, slender 9-10" fruits can also be picked at 2-3" for baby eggplant. Compact growth, ideal for containers.

*Ichiban- 61 days to maturity. An Asian variety with long, slender dark purple 7" fruit. Reliable

*Little Finger-68 days to maturity. Asian variety harvested at 2-3" for baby eggplants. Tender sweet fruits.

*Louisiana Long Green- 75-100 days. An heirloom variety with long slender, green 9" fruits. Tender skin, mild, non-bitter flavor.

*Orient Express-58 days. A very early Asian variety with outstanding production. Long, slender 10" purple fruits.

*Rosa Bianca-80-90 days to maturity. An Italian heirloom with rose and white striped fruits. Tender skin, mild, creamy flavor.

*Snowy-60-65 days to maturity. An early white skinned variety with 8-10" oblong fruits. Sweet, mild, non-bitter.

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