

Home Gardening Series

Eggplant

Craig R. Andersen
Associate Professor and
Extension Specialist -
Vegetables

Environment

Light – sunny
Soil – well-drained
Fertility – rich
pH – 6.0 to 7.0
Temperature – warm
Moisture – average

Culture

Planting – transplant after danger
of frost
Spacing – 18-24 x 36 inches
Hardiness – very tender annual
Fertilizer – heavy feeder

Eggplant – *Solanum melongena*

Eggplant is a native of India, but it is widely grown in the warmer regions of both hemispheres, especially in the West Indies and southern United States. It is also known as guinea squash or aubergine, a word of French, Arabic and Persian origins.

Eggplant is a very tender vegetable that requires a long, warm season for best yields. The culture of eggplant is similar to that of tomatoes, but eggplants are spaced closer together than tomato plants and are not always staked. Eggplant requires careful attention for a good harvest. Small-fruited and ornamental varieties can be grown in containers or for decorative purposes.



Cultural Practices

Planting Time

Eggplant is best started by transplanting, and it is important to get the plant off to a proper start. Select plants that have well-developed roots in the soil ball. Do not plant too early. Transplant after the soil has warmed and the danger of frost has passed. Eggplants are more susceptible than tomato plants to injury from low temperatures.

Control flea beetles immediately after transplanting. Young plants can be defoliated in hours if not treated.

Spacing of Plants

Space plants 18 to 20 inches apart in the row. Three to six plants are usually sufficient for most families. Allow 30 to 36 inches between rows.

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Cultivars

Crop	Cultivar	Days to Maturity	Plants Per 100 Feet of Row	Remarks
Eggplant	Black Beauty	70	60 plants	Heirloom, large black fruits.
	Classic	76	60 plants	An extremely productive hybrid, long, slim fruit, glossy black color.
	Fairy Tale	50	60 plants	AAS winner, clusters of 1- by 5-inch fruit marbled purple and white.
	Gretel	55	60 plants	AAS winner, compact plant for beds or containers, white 1- by 4-inch fruit.
	Hansel	55	60 plants	AAS winner, compact plant for beds or containers, purple fruit. Harvest when 2 to 6 inches long.

Abbreviation: **AAS**: All-America Selections®

Care

Use a starter fertilizer solution when transplanting. Side-dress with nitrogen (as you would tomatoes) when the plants are half-grown and again immediately after harvest of the first fruits. The plants tolerate dry weather after they are well established, but irrigate during extended dry periods. Eggplant thrives in the heat of summer.

Harvesting

Harvest the fruits when they are 6 to 8 inches long and glossy. Use a knife or pruning shears rather than breaking or twisting the stems. Leave the large, usually green, calyx attached to the fruit.

When the fruits become dull and brown, they are too mature for culinary use and should be cut off and discarded. Overmature fruits are spongy and seedy. The fruit does not store well and should be eaten soon after it is harvested. Large, vigorous plants yield as many as four to six fruits at a time during the peak of the season.

Common Problems

Early blight starts at the bottom of the plant. Verticillium wilt causes yellowing, wilting and death of the plants. Flea beetles cause tiny holes in the leaves, and damage can be severe if unchecked. These beetles can be controlled by applying an insecticide.

diseases – verticillium wilt, early blight, Phomopsis

insects – flea beetles, aphids, lace bugs, Colorado potato beetles, red spider mites

Harvesting and Storage

days to maturity – 100 to 150 days from seed; 60 to 85 days from transplants

harvest – Fruit should be large, shiny and uniformly colored. When the side of the fruit is pressed lightly with thumbnail and an indentation remains, the fruit is ripe. Long, slender Japanese eggplant may be ready to harvest from finger or hot dog size. The fruit is too ripe if it has a dull color and brown seeds and needs to be discarded.

approximate yields (per 10 feet of row) – 20 pounds

amount to raise per person – 12 pounds

storage – cool (45 to 50 degrees F), moist (90 percent relative humidity) conditions; one week

preservation – freeze, pickle

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. I planted my eggplants early, but they did not grow very well. Why?

A. They probably were planted while the soil was too cold. It is better to hold the plants (but keep them growing) until the soil warms. Eggplant should be planted one week later than tomatoes. Mulching with black plastic film can help warm the soil.

Q. The fruit on my eggplant was delicious during its early production. Now, the fruit we harvest is bitter and has brown areas on it.

A. The bitter fruit is caused by plant stress and subsequent slow growth stimulated by hot, dry weather. The brown area is caused by sun scalding. If the scalding is not too severe, remove the scalded area. The eggplant can still be eaten.

Q. What causes eggplant fruit to become misshapen and oddly colored?

A. Poor-quality eggplant fruit is generally associated with low moisture and high temperature conditions. Overmature eggplant fruit will become dull-colored and often develops a bronze appearance. For maximum production, remove the eggplant fruits before they are fully mature to allow additional fruit to develop.

Q. The fruit of my eggplant develops a rotted area that extends deep into the fruit.

A. This is probably *Alternaria* fruit rot, but it could be caused by several things. This is not to be confused with *Phomopsis* fruit rot that produces a dish-shaped spot that turns brown and has ring-like structures around it. *Alternaria* fruit rot is controlled with the normal fungicide spray program.

Q. I transplanted my eggplants, and the next day all of the leaves were gone.

A. Flea beetles can defoliate a young transplant in 12 hours or less. Apply an insecticide shortly after transplanting.

Q. My eggplants have quit producing. The upper leaves are turning yellow and falling off.

A. These are symptoms of spider mites. Check the underside of the leaves for small, red mites.

Q. Recently one of my eggplants died within a few days. I found a white fungal mat at the base of the plant. What caused this?

A. This is southern blight, a soil-borne disease that can be controlled by crop rotation and prompt removal of dead plant material.