



Vegetable Gardening Tips

Growing Information for the Home Gardener Series



Eggplants

The eggplant is believed to be a native vegetable of the Far East. Nutritionally, they are not particularly high in anything but are eaten primarily for their flavor. Eggplants are commonly stuffed, fried or cooked as a casserole.

Eggplant is a warm-season vegetable that not only tolerates hot weather, but, for best growth, requires more warmth than many other vegetables commonly grown in Louisiana. It is very sensitive to low temperatures and frost.

One of the most common problems encountered in growing eggplants is transplanting them into the spring garden too early. Early season soil and air temperatures are generally too low for eggplants. These low temperatures tend to harden eggplants and stunt their growth. Since stunted plants recover very slowly, transplants should be set in the garden after the average daily temperature is about 70 degrees F. Start seeds 8 to 10 weeks before the desired time of transplanting. Gardeners in north Louisiana should start early transplanting in mid- to late April; those in south Louisiana from mid-to late March. If the weather has been continuously warm, most varieties will reach their first harvest in 80-85 days. Eggplants may also be seeded directly in the garden after the soil temperature has warmed.

Since eggplants will bloom and set fruit under high temperature conditions, seed can be planted through about June or transplanted in early to mid-July.

A constant, rapid growth is important for quality fruit production from young eggplants. Spring-planted eggplants that are well-cared-for will produce throughout the summer and into the fall.

Varieties

Eggplants come in a variety of shapes, sizes and colors. They run from large to lemon size. They may be long, pear-shaped, oblong, round or cylindrical. Their colors may be purple, yellow, white, ash, variegated, apple green, etc. Several varieties are consistently good producers.

The varieties recommended for Louisiana include:

- Early small-to-medium hybrids are Epic, Rosita, Calliope, Night Shadow, Black Bell or Dusky. Large-fruited hybrids are Santana or Classic.
- All-American selections are the dwarf Fairy Tale and fingerlike Hansel.
- Florida Highbush and Black Beauty are large, open-pollinated varieties that hold fruit high above the ground.
- Green eggplants produce fruits that are oval, cylindrical or long, depending on the selection. The green-skinned fruit generally resist the bitterness that summer heat can bring.
- Oriental types are long and thin - like Ichiban.
- White culinary eggplants that are medium and cylindrical are Casper and Ghostbuster.

Culture

Eggplants like warm, well-drained soils that are rich in organic matter. Prepare the plant beds several weeks in advance, if possible. This can be done at the same time you are planting your early spring vegetable garden. On soils of average fertility, apply 2-3 lbs. of 8-24-24 complete fertilizer per 100 feet of row. Build up rows 8-10 inches high to improve drainage and aeration. Rows should be at least 3 to 3 1/2 feet apart from center to center. Set the transplants 2 to 2 1/2 feet apart in the row.

Using a black plastic mulch with spring eggplants has shown good results. The plastic not only controls weeds, but warms the soil and helps to retain moisture. This practice can extend your fall season or bring earlier bearing by two weeks. Without this soil warming mulch, wait until about mid spring to plant eggplants and peppers.

Maintain vigorous growth throughout the growing season by keeping soils uniformly moist. Since eggplants will be in the garden for a long season, supply a sidedressing of nitrogen about once a month. Sidedress when fruit first set at the rate of 1/2 lb. ammonium nitrate per 100 feet of row, then again every 4 to 6 weeks. On sandy soils, sidedress with a complete fertilizer like 8-8-8 at a rate of 2 lbs./100 feet of row.

Normally, eggplants are not staked, but a heavy fruit load requires some support later in the season.

Often, fruit grown in summer taste extremely bitter. The main cause of bitter fruit is lack of soil moisture. To help prevent bitterness, irrigate during dry weather. The green and white fruited varieties are usually less bitter under these growing conditions than the purple varieties.

The fruit may be harvested when they reach at least one-third to two-thirds their fully mature size. High quality fruit will have a high gloss to the skin. If you push in on the side of the fruit with your thumb, it should not spring back. Fruits that are dull, spongy and contain hard or brown seeds are overmature. Overmature fruit are of poor quality and should be cut and discarded to promote longer productivity. When harvesting, cut the tough fruit stems with a knife or clippers to avoid damaging the plant branches. Fruits will store well for at least a week with refrigeration.

Phomopsis Blight on Eggplant

The *Phomopsis* blight may appear as gray-brown dead spots on leaves and a brown shrunken stem at the soil line. If it infects the fruits, a tan, leathery and sunken area develops. Control piercing and sucking insects to help avoid this disease.

Flea beetles are small (1/16 inch), black, jumping beetles that eat pinholes in leaves. Leaves will look like they have been peppered with bird shot. The damage stunts growth and lowers yields.

Spider mites can be a serious problem. Look for foliar graying and possibly webs. Treat populations early.

Dacthal (DCPA) herbicide provides good general weed control when applied at or after transplanting. For postemergence grass control, use Poast plus a crop oil. Follow the label directions.

Pest Control				
Pest	Control	Rate Per Gallon Water	Days Before Harvest	Application
Insects				
Spider mite	Vendex 50/4L	1T/1T	3	For all insects, apply when they appear.
Aphids	Malathion 57% EC	2t	3	
	M-PEDE	3T	0	
Flea and Potato Beetles	Thiodan 2EC/50	4t/2T	1	
	Sevin 80%S	2T	0	
Caterpillars	Same as for beetles or			Bt on caterpillars only.
	Bacillus (Bt)	See label	0	
White flies	Thiodan 2EC/50	4t/2T	1	For all insects, apply when they appear.
	Malathion 57% EC	2t	3	
Diseases				
Anthracnose	Maneb 80	1T	5	Every 7-10 days
	Mancozeb	Follow the label		
	Chlorothalonil			
	Copper			
	Neem			



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Pub. 1986 (4M) 8/08 Rev.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. This Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.