

Cleveland Seed Bank's

guide to growing

EGGPLANT

Eggplant is native to what we now call Southern and Eastern Asia. It migrated westward along the Silk Road and in the arms of the Spanish Moors. Although colonists brought it to the New World in the 1500s, many were afraid of plants in the nightshade family, believing them to be poisonous, so eggplant was mainly used by colonists as ornamentals.

Early eggplant cultivars were small and yellow or white, hence the name eggplant! The French term 'aubergine' is the European word for eggplant.

Latin name: *Solanum melongena*

Sun: Full

Life cycle: Annual

Direct sow or transplant: Both

Height: 2-3'

Container Friendly: Not readily



hummingbirdproject.org

SOW



Direct sow/transplant: In NE OH, transplanting using soil blocks or cell trays is ideal due to our shorter growing season. Direct sow if you do not have adequate light or heat indoors.

Common mistakes: Pot up transplants frequently as true leaves emerge. Eggplants love heat, resist sowing too early as cooler temperatures can rot seedlings.

Days to germination: ~ 7-14 days. More germination time may be needed during cooler temperatures.

When: Start seedlings indoors 6-8 weeks before final frost. In NE OH, final frost is around the 2nd week of April. Transplant and direct sow outdoors once there is no danger of frost.

Seedling Depth: ~ 1/4 inch deep.

Spacing: Space transplants 18 inches apart, more or less depending on variety size.

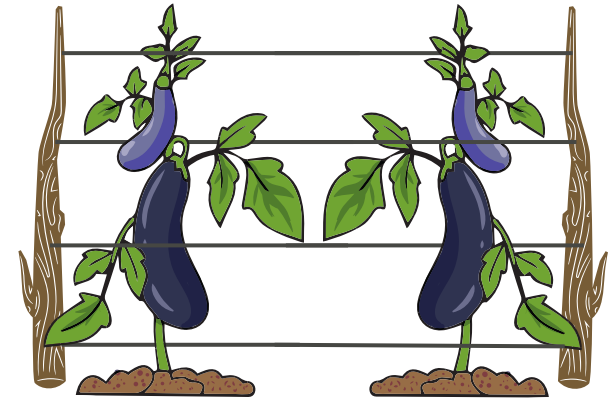
Succession sowing: Eggplant has such a long growing period that it's usually not succession sown.

Companion planting: Peas offer extra nitrogen, making a great companion choice. Herbs like basil, mint, & thyme deter pests.

GROW

Soil: Eggplants are "heavy feeders" so make sure to feed with compost often. They like a pH between 5.5-7.5. Mulch can help retain heat around the plant.

Trellising Eggplant needs a strong trellis to support their heavy fruits. The 'Florida Weave' trellis uses only stakes and twine to hold up the plant as it grows.



The 'Florida Weave' trellis system.

Containers: Eggplant can be tough to grow in containers, but if you're committed, choose smaller varieties like bush cultivars and use a 10+ gallon container. Sow or transplant 2-3 plants 12-16" apart, depending on cultivar size.

Pests: Row covers can prevent many pests like flea beetles, aphids, hornworms, and potato beetles.

Diseases: Eggplant is susceptible to many different diseases. Rotate nightshade family crops, like eggplant, around your garden each growing season to prevent disease vulnerability.

HARVEST



Eggplant is bitter when both under- and overripe.

Harvest often to keep the plant fruiting!

When to harvest: Eggplant has a long growing season, it's best to check the 'days to maturity' time on your seed packet and plan ahead.

Testing maturity: Press your finger into the eggplant's flesh. If the flesh springs back, it's still immature. If your finger leaves an indentation, the fruit is overripe. The best-tasting eggplant is between these stages!

The flesh turning from glossy to dull is also an indication that seeds are becoming more mature (and that the eggplant is becoming more bitter). Plan to harvest while the eggplant is still glossy.



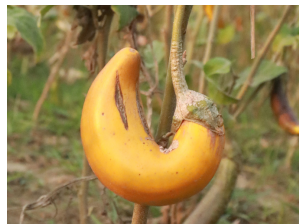
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SAVE

Eggplant self-pollinates, but insects readily visit flowers. Isolation is needed to prevent hybrids.



1 Eggplant seeds are not fully mature until well past the edible stage. Wait until the eggplant changes color, to a dull yellow or brown, then test maturity by pressing your finger into the flesh. If the indentation stays, the seed is ready to be saved.



2 Cut eggplant in half and scoop out seeds with a spoon. Toss the pulp into a bowl and fill with water. Rub the pulp between your hands to separate the seed from the plant material as much as possible.



3 Viable seed will sink to the bottom of the bowl. Strain and allow seeds to dry on a screen. Seed viable for 6 years.

Preserving the harvest: Eggplant is often enjoyed while fresh, but there are other ways to preserve your harvest too!

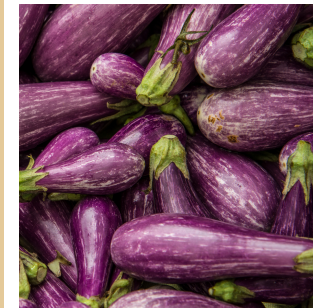
Blanch eggplant before freezing to preserve texture and flavor. Puree eggplant before freezing to easily prep for future soups and sauces.

Eggplant can also be sliced and pickled.

TYPES

Diversity: There are so many different varieties of eggplant and not all are the traditional deep purple color! Some come in green, or even white, with some varieties offering beautiful purple variegation.

Many cultivars have been selected for their specific size, shape, color, and cooking use.



Fairy Tale



Rosa Bianca



Black Beauty



Ping Tung Long



Chao Phraya



Casper