



GROWING EGGPLANT



Dramatic foliage and colorful fruits (white, green and other colors in addition to the usual deep purple) make this heat-loving annual a good choice for ornamental beds as well as vegetable gardens. Needs two or more months with night-time temperatures in the 70s.

Site Characteristics

Sunlight:

- part shade

Soil conditions:

- requires well-drained soil
- requires high fertility

Prefers fertile, well-drained, slightly acid soil that is high in organic matter for best growth and yield, but tolerates a broader range of soil types. Has moderate moisture needs.

Special locations:

- outdoor containers - Small-fruited and dwarf varieties are best, but all do well in containers.

Plant Traits

Lifecycle: annual

Tender annual.

Ease-of-care: moderately difficult

Requires fertile soil and a long, warm growing season.

Height: 2 to 4 feet

Spread: 2 to 4 feet

Bloom time:

- mid-summer
- late summer

Flower color: violet

Relatively inconspicuous, curling down and hidden within foliage.

Foliage color: medium green

Foliage texture: coarse

Shape: upright

Shape in flower: same as above

bears ornamental fruit - In addition to the familiar deep purple, oval, glossy fruits, some varieties produce long, thin fruits or small, ball-shaped fruit. Other colors include white, green and orange.

Helping You Put Knowledge to Work

Growing Information

How to plant:

Propagate by seed

Germination temperature: 60 F to 95 F - Germinates best between 80 F and 90 F.

Days to emergence: 7 to 10 - At 85 F.

Seed can be saved 4 years.

Maintenance and care:

Start inside about 6 weeks before last frost date (or about 8 weeks before expected transplanting). Plant 1/4 inch deep in flats or cell-type containers. Keep soil warm (about 80 F to 90 F if possible) until emergence. Eggplant will not germinate in cool soil.

Harden off plants carefully before transplanting by reducing temperature and water.

Wait until weather has settled, all chance of frost has passed and soil is in the 60s F before transplanting, perhaps 2 to 3 weeks after the average last frost date. Cool conditions can weaken plants. Frost will kill them.

Consider using raised beds or black plastic mulch to warm soil and speed early-season growth. If using organic mulches to help retain moisture, do not apply until the soil has warmed.

Set transplants 18 to 24 inches apart in rows 30 to 36 inches apart.

Use row covers to protect plants from pests.

If season is cool, fruit set may be inconsistent. Plants with heavy fruit set benefit from staking.

Eggplants are heavy feeders, but avoid high-nitrogen fertilizers. They may encourage lush foliage growth at the expense of fruit.

Pinch off blossoms 2 to 4 weeks before first expected frost so that plants channel energy into ripening existing fruit, not producing new ones.

To help reduce disease, do not plant eggplants or other tomato-family crops in the same location more than once every three or four years.

Pests:

Aphids - A hard stream of water can be used to remove aphids from plants. Wash off with water occasionally as needed early in the day. Check for evidence of natural enemies such as gray-brown or bloated parasitized aphids and the presence of alligator-like larvae of lady beetles and lacewings.

Flea beetles - Control weeds. Use row covers to help protect plants from early damage. Put in place at planting and remove before temperatures get too hot or plants start to flower.

Colorado potato beetles - Handpick beetles, larvae and eggs.

Cutworms - Use cardboard collars around transplants if cutworms are a problem.

Diseases:

Verticillium wilt - Most serious disease of eggplant. Remove and destroy entire infested plant along with immediately surrounding soil and soil clinging to roots. Set into soil never planted to tomatoes, peppers, or strawberries. If you cannot, locate new plants in a part of the garden different from previous year's location, remove infested soil and replace with fresh soil.

Varieties

Heat-loving eggplants may be difficult to grow successfully in cooler regions of the state. Look for short-season varieties that will fruit under cool New York conditions.

Asian varieties are usually long and thin. Their skins are often thin enough that they don't need peeling.

Varieties recommended for New York include:

Early varieties:

Ichiban

Dusky

Little Fingers

Source: <http://explore.cornell.edu>

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