

Organic Eggplant:

Growing and Seed Saving Information



Eggplant

Eggplant (*Solanum melongena*) is a warm season tender annual in the *Solanaceae* family which includes peppers, tomatoes, tomatillos, potatoes and ground cherries. Eggplant types include the familiar Italian type and the long and slender Asian type with a thinner skin that doesn't need to be peeled. Colors range from deep purple to blushing lavender to stripes of orange and green.

Soil and Nutrient Requirements

Deep well drained sandy loam with pH 6.5-6.8 is best. Eggplants are heavy feeders. Plants are sensitive to nitrogen; if over fertilized, they will grow excessive foliage and produce less fruit. Use a high phosphorous starter.

Position

Full sun

Seeding Depth

1/4"

Plant Spacing

18-24"

Row Spacing

30-36" or 24" double rows on beds with 4-6' centers.

When to Sow

Sow seeds indoors 8-12 weeks before last frost date. Optimal soil temperature for germination is 85°F. Seeds can be sown thickly into flats and then planted into cell trays or containers after true leaves appear. Plant outdoors when daytime temperatures are at least 65°F and night time temperatures are above 50°F. Plastic mulch and floating row cover may be used to increase soil and air temperatures and ward off insects.

Frost Tolerant

No. Eggplants are very sensitive to cold temperatures, even more so than their close relatives, peppers and tomatoes.

Drought Tolerant

Eggplants will tolerate dry conditions, but do best with irrigation especially during flowering and fruit set.

Heat Tolerant

Yes

Seed Specs

5,500-7,500 seeds/oz (6,500 avg). M=1,000

Seeding Rate

7,260 plants/acre using 24" plant spacing in 24" double rows with 6' centers.

Harvest

Harvest eggplants when skin is glossy and thumbprint will not leave an impression, if seeds are brown fruit is over-ripe. Regular harvest increases production of fruit.

Storage

Store at 50-55°F and 90% relative humidity. Will keep quality for up to one week.

Organic Eggplant:

Growing and Seed Saving Information



Pest Info

- Frequent scouting for Colorado Potato Beetles is recommended as both adults and larvae can quickly defoliate plants. Crop rotation, control of solanaceous weeds, barrier trenches between old and new plantings, trap cropping, use of straw mulch or row cover can delay or reduce CPB pressure.
- If plants are flowering but failing to set fruit, the culprit (at least in northern regions) is likely to be the tarnished plant bug, which particularly appreciates the sap of eggplant and pepper flowers. Consider planting under row cover, or where this is impractical, using a spray containing one or more of the following: *Beauveria bassiana* (see Naturalis™ in the Supplies section) pyrethrum, neem oil, or an insecticidal soap.
- Row cover is also effective against flea beetles, which eat small holes in the leaves and can be particularly damaging to young seedlings. Under light insect pressure and good growing conditions, strong plants usually outgrow the damage.

Disease Info

- In soils containing the Verticillium wilt fungi (*Verticillium albo-atrum* and *Verticillium dahliae*), long crop rotations must be practiced to reduce severity of the disease. Avoid soils that have grown peppers, tomatoes and strawberries. Disease starts with yellow blotches appearing on the leaves, which then wilt and drop off, exposing the fruit to sunburn.
- White mold (*Sclerotinia sclerotiorum*) is a fungal disease which produces water-soaked lesions on the fruit and causes rotting of stem. Entire branches of the plant will wilt and then die. White mold is typically found in areas of poor drainage. Prevention includes increasing plant spacing to promote good air flow and improving the soil's capacity to absorb water through raised beds or building organic matter over time.