

SUSTAINABLE GARDENING

FOR SCHOOL AND HOME GARDENS

Eggplant

Solanum melongena L.



QUICK FACTS

- Plant family: *Solanaceae* (Nightshades)
- Season: Warm
- Life cycle: Annual
- Seed to first harvest: 90-115 days



Create a Sustainable Garden by improving soil health, relying on locally available materials and resources, and practicing environmentally sound horticultural practices

History

The eggplant is a member of the *Solanaceae* family, also known as the Nightshade family, which includes crops such as the Irish potato, tomato, tomatillo and pepper (see Figure 1).

The eggplant is thought to have originated in Asia (mainly parts of India and Burma/Myanmar), and the first record of this vegetable was from a 5th century Chinese book. The original eggplant was a wild plant with orange, pea-sized, spiny fruit (see Figure 2) – very different than the present-day eggplant!

Using newly established trade routes, the Arabs and Persians likely took the eggplant to Africa around the eighth century, and then the Moors took it to Spain around the 12th century. It was a common vegetable in northern Europe by the 16th century. After Spain discovered the New World, eggplant was transported along with many new crops. Eggplants were documented in Brazil by 1650. By the 1800s, ornamental eggplant varieties were grown in the U.S., after they were introduced by Thomas Jefferson. It wasn't until the 1900s that other varieties were grown for consumption.

Another name for an eggplant is aubergine (preferred in the U.K., Ireland, and France) or brinjal (preferred in South Asia and Africa). Eggplant was once called the “mad apple” and was considered to cause insanity, but was also called the “apple of love” because it was believed to have the properties of a love potion. Today, the eggplant is most popular in Asia, where leading producers include China and India.

Eggplants are annuals (with a life cycle of one year) that require a long, warm growing season. Very tolerant of hot weather, many eggplant varieties are highly suitable to the Louisiana climate.

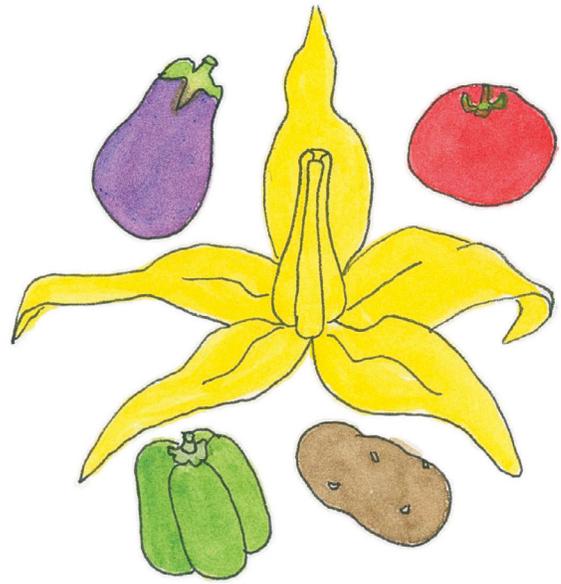


Figure 1. Eggplant belongs to the *Solanaceae* plant family, along with the Irish potato, tomato, pepper and many more.



Figure 2. The original eggplant produced very small and spiny fruit.

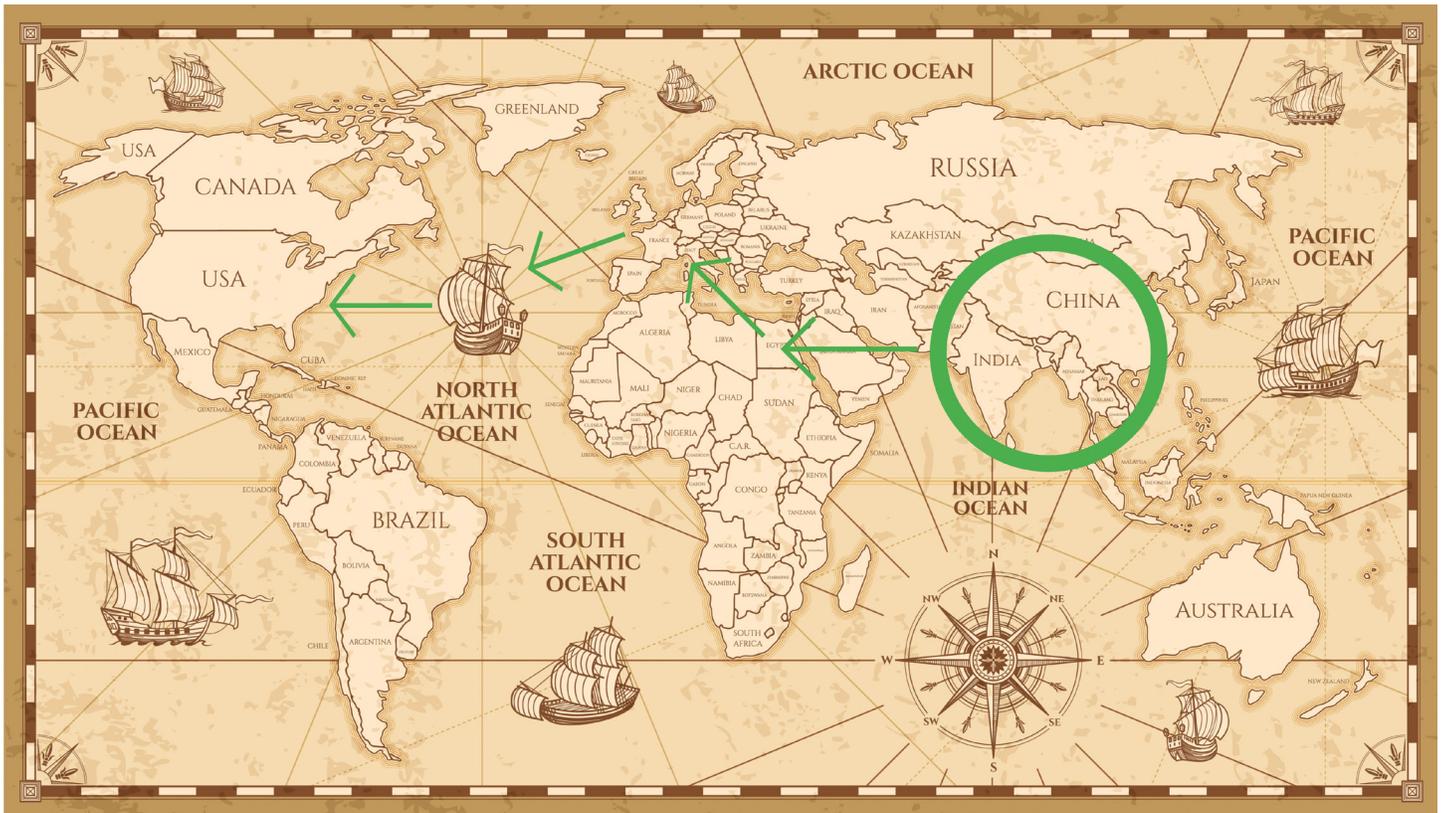


Figure 3. Map showing the origin and migration of eggplant to the U.S.

Growing

Varieties

Eggplants can be grouped into three main types: (1) Asian, (2) Italian and (3) miniature or specialty (see Figure 4). These types vary in shape, size and mature fruit color (such as purple, white, orange, red or green). Asian varieties generally produce elongated, purple-hued fruit, but also include smaller, round varieties ranging in color from purple, green and white. Italian varieties are the more traditional eggplants, producing medium-sized and oval fruit in various shades of purple. Miniature or specialty eggplant varieties are just smaller in size and are often very attractive and superior in taste. Some Asian varieties can also be grown as miniature eggplants.



Figure 4. Main types of eggplant are Italian, Asian and specialty.

Eggplants have either open-pollinated (including heirloom) or hybrid varieties. Some eggplants are heirloom varieties, like Rosa Bianca, meaning these seeds have been saved for at least 50 years, can be saved each season and replanted, and are open-pollinated.

Eggplants produce perfect flowers (both male and female parts in each flower), which may be cross-pollinated, but self-pollination is more common. Flowers generally remain open for two or three days and are

most receptive to pollination in the morning. The extent of natural crossing depends upon insect activity. If saving seed, different varieties should be separated by a distance of 300-1,600 feet to avoid cross-pollination. Generally, it is not recommended to save seed for future planting with hybrid varieties, as they are usually not expressed properly in the next generation.

See the recommended eggplant varieties for Louisiana in Table 1.

Table 1. Recommended Eggplant Varieties for Louisiana

Variety Name	Description	Days to Harvest*	Harvest size
Asian			
Calliope	Purple and white variegated, oval fruits; Indian variety (mini or mature); hybrid	64 days	Mini: ½"x2" long Mature: 2.5"x3-4" long
Ichiban	Long, slim, dark purple fruits; productive Japanese variety; hybrid	50-60 days	Mature: 10" long
Kermit	Green and white variegated; round fruits; specialty Thai variety (mini only); hybrid	60 days	Mini only: 1.5-2" diameter
Orient Express	Long, slender, dark purple fruits; productive and early; hybrid	58 days	Mature: 1.5-2.5"x8-10" long
Ping Tung Long	Glossy magenta, elongated fruits; heirloom variety from Taiwan	70 days	Mature: 2"x11" or longer
Italian			
Black Beauty	Traditional dark purple, oval fruits; heirloom variety from Italy	65 days	Mature: 5"x6.5" long
Black Bell	Traditional dark purple, glossy oval fruits; early variety; very productive, adaptable hybrid	60-70 days	Mature: 4-6" long
Classic	Traditional dark purple, glossy oval fruits; vigorous; very productive; tolerant and adaptable; good shelf life; quality hybrid	76 days	Mature: 4"x8" long
Dusky	Traditional dark purple, glossy oval fruits; hybrid	62 days	Mature: 5-6" long
Nadia	Traditional dark glossy purple, oval fruits; vigorous; grows well in cooler weather; quality hybrid	67 days	Mature: 3-4"x7-8" long
Night Shadow	Traditional dark purple, glossy, oval fruits; adaptable; very productive hybrid	68 days	Mature: 4"x7" long
Rosa Bianca	Pink and white variegated; round (ribbed) heirloom variety from Italy	73 days	Mature: 5-7"x 4-6" long
Santana	Traditional dark purple, glossy oval fruits; early variety; very productive, flavorful and tender; grows well in hot weather; hybrid	80 days	Mature: 6-8" long

Variety Name	Description	Days to Harvest*	Harvest size
Miniature only/Specialty			
Cloud Nine	Pure white, oval fruits with white flesh; productive, flavorful, hybrid	75 days	Mature: 7" long
Fairy Tale	Purple and white variegated, elongated, miniature fruits on compact plants; productive, flavorful hybrid	65 days	Mini only: 1"x2-4" long

Notes: *From transplant to harvest

Table varieties selected from recommendations from LSU AgCenter, UF Extension, Texas A&M Extension and Southeastern U.S. Vegetable Crop Handbook. Variety descriptions compiled from High Mowing Organic Seeds, Johnny's Selected Seeds, Reimer Seeds, Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, Sow True Seed, Jordan Seeds and Osborne Seed.

Other recommended eggplant varieties for Louisiana include:

Italian: Epic

Asian: Cambodian Green Giant

When and How to Plant

Eggplant seeds should be started inside 8-10 weeks before the desired transplanting dates (see Table 2). Seeds will germinate best in warm soil temperatures (75-90 degrees Fahrenheit) and will take longer to germinate in cooler soil (keep above 60 F). Using seed germination trays (with at least 1.5-inch diameter cells),

plant one seed per cell at a shallow depth, about 1/8-inch to 1/4-inch deep, just deep enough to be covered with a thin layer of soilless potting mix (see Figure 5). Make sure to keep the seed trays in a well-lit area above 70 F. Keep soil moist, which usually requires daily light watering. A seedling heat mat and plastic dome lid are helpful in maintaining ideal germination conditions.

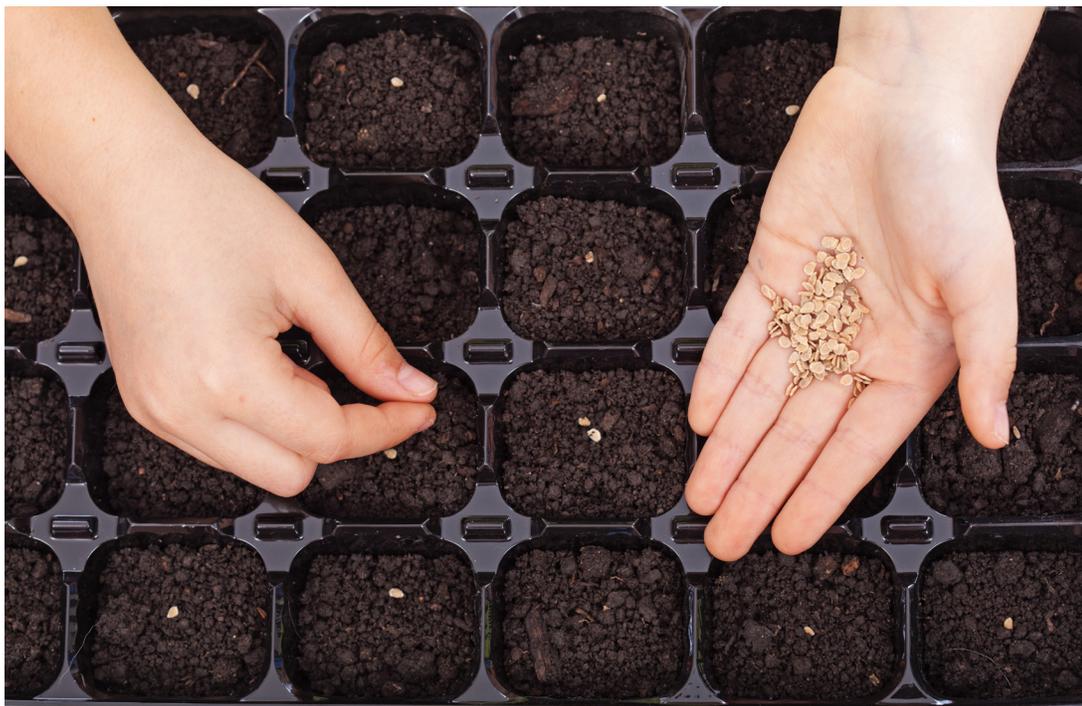


Figure 5. Planting seeds in a germination tray.

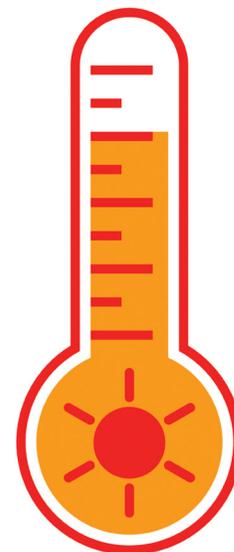


Table 2. Eggplant Planting Guide

Transplant Outside Dates	Plant Spacing (inches)	Row Spacing (inches)	Days to Harvest*
North LA: April-May 15, Aug. South LA: March 15-May 15, Aug.-Sept.	18-36(closer for miniature)	30-36	90-115 days (70-90 days)

*First range of days: seed to first harvest; second range of days in parenthesis: transplant to first harvest

Note: Table adapted from LSU AgCenter and UF Extension Planting Guides and Southeastern U.S. Vegetable Production Handbook.

Where to Plant

Since eggplant is a warm season crop, it requires warm soil and full sun (at least 6 hours/day). Eggplants prefer well-drained, sandy loam with a soil pH between 6.0 and 6.8. It is recommended to plant eggplant in box beds or in traditional raised garden rows that are about 12 inches tall to ensure good drainage. In all types of gardens, it is recommended to add a layer of compost, peat moss, rotted hay or other organic matter and mix into the soil to optimize plant health.

Reflective plastic mulch — or a plastic fabric/film — is recommended to deter aphids that transmit viruses, to increase soil temperature and to control weeds. Drip irrigation is also recommended when using plastic mulch to maintain ideal soil moisture and to encourage productive plants.

Each season rotate plant families — avoid planting crops from the same plant family in the same area of the garden — to reduce disease and pests. A longer crop rotation is recommended for *Solanaceae* crops to avoid Verticillium wilt disease.

Plant Care

It is recommended to follow [sustainable gardening](#) principles.

Watering: To prevent a bitter-tasting eggplant, make sure the soil has adequate moisture and irrigate during dry and hot weather. Consistent watering of about 1 inch per week is recommended, using a thorough soaking to promote deep root growth. Increase watering during high temperatures and high winds, or for sandy soils.

Fertilization: Eggplants may produce small, misshapen fruits if inadequately supplied with nitrogen. Like many solanaceous crops, they are prone to blossom-end rot, a disorder resulting from calcium deficiency. This may be due to inconsistent watering, which may cause calcium to be poorly dissolved in the soil for uptake. If blossom-end rot persists with even watering, conduct a soil test and discuss the results with a local county extension agent.

Organic fertilizers, such as compost, fish emulsion, composted poultry litter or manure, worm castings, and blood or bone meal, originate from living organisms. They are safer and far more environmentally sustainable than traditional synthetic fertilizers. They naturally release nutrients more slowly and over a longer period of time. When applying organic fertilizer, it is important to use in unison with compost, cover crops and crop rotation, which all work together to build soil health. Learn how to convert inorganic fertilizer recommendations to organic fertilizers [here](#).

Alternatively, a synthetic fertilizer may be used at a rate of about 1.25 pounds (2.5 cups) of 13-13-13 for every 25 feet of row or 75 square feet. Broadcast, or sprinkle evenly, over the soil before planting and then mix in about 3-6 inches deep using a rake. Supplemental side-dressing, or reapplication of synthetic or organic fertilizer, is recommended when the first immature fruits are visible. Side-dressing is the addition of a small amount of fertilizer to the soil around already established plants when the plant begins to fruit or vine, primarily to provide nitrogen. If using synthetic fertilizer, sprinkle 2 tablespoons around each plant, keeping it about 6 inches away from the plant stem, and water into the soil. Additional side-dressing may be applied every 3-4 weeks to keep this long-season crop productive. Fish emulsion is a good, fast-release source of nitrogen for side-dressing if an organic fertilizer is preferred.

Support: It's recommended to stake and trellis eggplant as it grows to avoid collapsing and falling over due to the weight of the fruit and to prevent wind damage. Staking will also improve yield and fruit quality. The recommended, most effective staking and trellising method is the Florida Weave technique. Place a metal T-post at the end of each row and one in the middle, then place squared wooden stakes between every few eggplants. When the plants are 12-15 inches tall, use garden or butcher twine to weave between each plant (about 10 inches above the soil) on both sides and tie the twine to the stakes. In this method, the plant is never tied to the twine or stake. It's recommended to do one more level of trellising when the plants have grown another 12-15 inches, about 10 inches

above the last support weave. Watch this helpful [video](#) tutorial on the Florida Weave system (skip to 4:00 for eggplant-specific trellising).

Weeds: Plastic mulch will control most of the weeds; hand pull weeds close to the plant, especially in the planting holes.

Insect pests and diseases: Eggplants are hardy plants and can withstand moderate insect pressure, but regular garden monitoring is recommended to identify insect pest issues. Common insect pests for eggplants

include aphids, whiteflies, flea beetles, cutworms and red spider mites. Most eggplant diseases are caused by fungus due to high humidity and moderate temperatures. Generally, prevent diseases by selecting disease-resistant eggplant varieties, rotating crops, following the recommended spacing and watering, and removing diseased plants. Common diseases for eggplants include blight, leaf spot, Phomopsis fruit rot and Verticillium wilt. See Table 3 to aid in diagnosis and management of some common eggplant insect pests and diseases.

Table 3. Organic and Natural Management for Common Eggplant Pests and Diseases

Symptoms	Diagnosis	Organic and Natural Management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curled and yellowed leaves • Stunted crops • Sticky honeydew on leaves that can lead to a sooty mold around plant base 	Aphids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely planting and harvest • Reduce water stress • Weed control • Use water jet to dislodge reflective mulches, insect barrier fabric • Beneficial insects: lady bugs, lacewings, predatory stink bugs, syrphid fly. • Insecticidal soap, neem oil, pyrethrin, Azera
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soil-borne fungus • Leaf blight and defoliation, low quality fruit, sunscald • May cause collar rot, stem canker and fruit rot 	Early blight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plant resistant varieties • Crop rotation • Remove plant debris, till under residue • Avoid overhead irrigation • Organic/natural fungicide sprays
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small irregular holes in leaves • Concentrated damage in young plants and seedlings • Stunted plants, reduced yield 	Flea beetle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely planting • Perimeter trap cropping • Super Light Insect Barrier or AgroFabric Pro to protect transplants • Crop rotation • Reflective mulches • Beneficial organisms: parasitic nematodes • Insecticidal oil, spinosad, pyrethrin, Azera
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm, humid conditions between 59-77 F • Yellow concentric rings OR irregular brown spots with light gray center • Spots appear on lower leaves first then move up • Leaf drop and sunscald 	Leaf spot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plant resistant varieties • Avoid overhead irrigation • Avoid working in fields when plants are wet • Reduce plant stress • Control weeds and incorporate plant debris • Organic/natural fungicides, copper-based
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brown, elongated lesions on stems • Dead leaves • Multiple, tan-colored, sunken areas on fruit • Fruit not reaching full size, ripening prematurely 	Phomopsis fruit rot and blight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plant resistant varieties • Remove diseased fruit • Organic/natural fungicides
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plants wilt and die. • Brown streaks inside root and lower stem when split lengthwise 	Verticillium wilt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long crop rotation • Remove infested crop debris. Control weeds

Symptoms	Diagnosis	Organic and Natural Management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaf discoloration and wilt • Tiny white flies flutter when plants are disturbed • Sticky honeydew on leaves • Sooty mold fungus 	Whiteflies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular monitoring of plants • Crop rotation • Insect netting (50+ mesh) • Beneficial insects: lacewings, parasitic wasps, predatory mites • Insecticidal soap, neem oil, <i>Beauveria bassiana</i>

Note: Table adapted from LSU AgCenter, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, UC Davis, UMass Extension, Alabama A&M and Auburn Universities Extension. The Louisiana Pesticide Law regulates the use of pesticides in schools to protect children and staff from harmful exposure to chemicals and is enforced by LDAF. The recommended alternative to routine pesticide use is integrated pest management (IPM), which combines pest control, disease management techniques and organic/natural alternatives, many of which are found in this table.

Harvest and Storage

Harvest eggplant throughout the summer when the skin is glossy and reaches the approximate harvest size (it's better to harvest young than to have overmatured fruit). A good test is to press the fruit with the thumb: if the flesh bounces back it's ready to harvest; if it's too firm and hard it's too young. Using a knife or shears (avoid twisting or breaking the stems), clip the fruit, leaving a small 1/2 inch stem attached. Wear gloves when harvesting eggplant because the stem and calyx (green top of the eggplant) often have prickly thorns. Keep plants well-picked (harvest once or twice a week) and

remove overmatured or poor-quality fruit to encourage high productivity.

Eggplants can be stored in the refrigerator for 5-7 days (ideal storage temperature is 46-54 F, 90-95% relative humidity). Do not cut fruit until you are ready to use, as eggplant will quickly turn brown. The fruits also bruise easily so avoid overhandling.

Preserve eggplant by freezing raw or cooked (blanched or fried) slices in freezer bags for up to 8 months.

Nutrition

Eggplant Is Nutritious and Good for You

Good source of dietary fiber

Important for bowel health, lowering cholesterol, controlling blood sugar and maintaining a healthy weight.

High in potassium

Essential for body function, especially the heart, kidney, nerves, bones and muscles.

Recipes

Basics of cooking with eggplant: extension.purdue.edu/foodlink/food.php?food=eggplant

General information on selecting, pairing, preparing and storing. Also includes a list of recipes.

Video on how to prepare eggplant: <https://youtu.be/aJdkkdWtBew>

Ever wondered about the basics of how to prepare eggplant? Chef Allison Kingery shows a couple of options for preparing this vegetable.

Taste Test Ideas



Roasted Eggplant



Ratatouille



Stuffed Eggplant

Other websites with many eggplant recipes:

Arizona Health Zone

Visit www.azhealthzone.org/recipes and search for eggplant recipes.

USDA MyPlate Kitchen

Visit www.myplate.gov/myplate-kitchen/recipes and search for eggplant recipes.

California's Eat Fresh

Visit eatfresh.org/find-a-recipe and search for eggplant recipes.

Produce for Better Health Foundation

<https://fruitsandveggies.org/fruits-and-veggies/eggplant/?view=recipes>
Recipes include grilled eggplant and tomato sandwiches and more.

Louisiana Harvest of the Month Program recipe: Eggplant Parmesan with Italian Tomato Sauce

The Louisiana Harvest of the Month program is designed to bring fresh local agricultural products into participating schools and communities. Each month, one Louisiana agricultural product is highlighted throughout the school. All Louisiana Farm to School recipes are developed, tasted and rated by the LSU College of Agriculture School of Nutrition and Food Sciences. In addition to being tested for overall flavor, color and texture, we strive for recipes that have low-cost and easy-to-find ingredients, easy-to-follow instructions and a reasonable preparation time.

Louisiana HARVEST of the MONTH

Eggplant Parmesan with Italian Tomato Sauce

Home Recipe

Serves: 4
Prep Time: 10 minutes

Ingredients

Italian Tomato Sauce

- ½ cup chopped onion
- 2 Tbsp chopped celery
- ¼ cup chopped green pepper
- 1 small garlic clove, minced
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 can of tomatoes, cut up (16 oz.)
- ⅓ cup tomato paste
- 1 tsp dried parsley flakes
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp dried oregano leaves
- ¼ tsp pepper
- 1 bay leaf

Eggplant Parmesan

- 1 medium eggplant, peeled and cut into ½ inch slices
- ¼ cup flour
- ½ cup breadcrumbs
- ½ tsp salt
- 2 egg whites, slightly beaten
- ⅓ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 6 oz. sliced whole milk Mozzarella cheese (reserve 2 oz. for topping)

Cooking Instructions

Italian Tomato Sauce

1. Sauté onions, celery, green pepper and garlic in oil. Stir in tomatoes, tomato paste and seasonings. Boil gently uncovered about 15 minutes. Stir occasionally. Remove bay leaf.

Eggplant Parmesan

1. Heat oven to 400° F. Combine flour, breadcrumbs and salt. Dip eggplant slices into beaten egg whites and then into mixture. Place slices on baking sheet that has been coated with cooking spray.
2. Bake for 15 minutes or until lightly brown. Alternate layers of eggplant, tomato sauce and cheeses in a greased, glass baking dish. Top with reserved Mozzarella cheese cut into triangles. Bake uncovered at 400° F for 15 minutes.

Nutrients Per 1 Cup Serving

• Calories	270	• Dietary Fiber	5 g
• Total Fat	13 g	• Protein	13 g
• Saturated Fat	5 g	• Calcium	25% DV*
• Cholesterol	25 mg	• Iron	15% DV*
• Sodium	800 mg	• Vitamin C	30% DV*
• Carbohydrates	27 g	• Vitamin A	15% DV*

*Percent Daily Values are based on 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs



For More Information
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Sources

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