

EGGPLANT



Yuma Eggplant production is minimal with some devoted to seed production and a limited amount for the fresh market.

Originally an from the Orient, Eggplant got its name from yellow and white fruited varieties with egg-sized fruits.

In India and Medieval Europe, Eggplant was credited with remarkable properties as a love potion...By the 16th Century, northern Europeans were calling Eggplants, "mad apples" in the belief that consumption would cause insanity...Eggplant were brought to America by Spaniards as "berengenas," meaning apples of love.

Ladies in the high society of China once made black dye from dark Eggplant skins and used it to stain their teeth to a black luster, a fashionable cosmetic use.

Eggplant is a member of the nightshade family and is Eggplant is related to potatoes, tomatoes, and peppers...Native to India, the early varieties were bitter, but cultivation and crossbreeding have greatly improved the flavor.

Thomas Jefferson, who experimented with many varieties of plants in his Virginia garden, is credited with introducing Eggplant to North America.

In various parts of Europe, people suspected that eating Eggplant caused madness, not to mention leprosy, cancer, and bad breath, which is why Eggplant was used mostly for decoration in England and the United States nearly up to the 20th century.

The Eggplant, or aubergine, as it is called in Europe, is extensively grown in eastern and southern Asia and in the U.S...Its beautiful purple color, glossy and smooth, is a familiar sight almost year round...What is not so well known is that prior to the 15th century, it was grown mainly as an ornament...People were afraid to eat it, probably because, like the tomato and the potato, it is a relative of the poisonous deadly nightshade.

To select an Eggplant, choose a firm, shiny fruit with a fresh green cap, and if it feels heavy for its size, all the better...If it is not to be used right away, it is better to refrigerate it...A simple and delicious way of preparing Eggplant is to cook it with olive oil, and it is probably for that reason that it is extremely popular in the Mediterranean countries, where this oil is heavily used.

Eggplant can be baked whole, either plain or stuffed...Many cooks like to salt this vegetable before use, and then press out any moisture...This salting and pressing is thought to cut down on the bitter taste which Eggplant sometimes has...One of the most popular and well-known methods of cooking Eggplant is a la Parmesan, in which the sautéed slices are layered alternately with a tomato sauce and cheese in an oven-proof dish, and then baked for about 45 minutes in a moderate oven.

Eggplant is a love it or hate it kind of a vegetable...Mention it in conversation and you'll either get an ode to the purple globe or silence...If you're in the "silence" camp, perhaps you just haven't found the right recipe yet.

The color of Eggplant fruits vary from white (which is how the "egg" plant got its name) to dark black, with the most common hue being purple.

If you press the skin with your thumb, the indentation will spring back if it's fresh...A good Eggplant should feel fairly heavy; a light one may be tough...Small Eggplants have thinner skins, fewer seeds, and tend to be sweeter and more tender. Larger ones work well for dishes that require peeled or sliced Eggplant.

Both cold and warm temperatures can damage Eggplant...It is best to store Eggplant uncut and unwashed in a plastic bag in the cooler section of the refrigerator...Do not force the Eggplant into the crisper if it is too big, since this will bruise the vegetable...Eggplant may be blanched or steamed then frozen for up to 6 months.

An Eggplant is almost 95 percent water...Salting Eggplant will reduce the amount of oil absorbed in cooking, and it helps reduce the bitterness of overripe Eggplant.

Eggplant, also known as Aubergine, Garden Egg, or Brinjal, come in a variety of shapes and sizes...They are white, green, yellowish, purple, or purple-black with an off-white spongy flesh...They can either be used peeled or with the skin intact.

Eggplant is quite versatile but must be cooked to be enjoyed...It can be sautéed, baked, roasted, fried, stuffed, used as a dip or stuffing, stir fried, steamed and grilled...The secret is cooking it properly so that it melts in your mouth!

Eggplant mix well with other vegetables, like tomatoes or mushrooms and can mixed well with ground beef, lamb, or tofu...They compliment other foods nicely as a side dish, and are hearty enough to steal the show in a main course (Eggplant Parmesan or a No-Fry Eggplant Parmesan), appetizer (Baba Ghannouj, Roasted Eggplant Dip, or Poor Man's Caviar).

Eggplant offers antioxidants with its purple shade and is actually a fruit, a berry, and part of the nightshade family.

Japanese Eggplant are slender with thinner skins and a more delicate, sweeter flavor and can be green, pink, white, lavender and purple...One American Eggplant equals about 3 Japanese Eggplants.

Sprinkle with a little olive oil and grill or broil them whole until the skin begins to blister and the Eggplant deflates - the meat will be melt in your mouth creamy delicious. Cut open and sprinkle a soft cheese, goat cheese does well, and maybe some fresh herbs, salt, freshly ground black pepper and another sprinkle of good olive oil on the inside.

Nutritionally, Eggplant is very low in calories because it's almost 95% water, and is only 25 calories a serving... It is a good source of fiber, folic acid, manganese, thiamin, Vitamin B6, magnesium and potassium; it also has Vitamin C, Niacin, Iron, some protein, and pantothenic acid.

Quite perishable, use Eggplant fruit immediately after they are purchased...The Eggplant actually becomes bitter as it ages so use it promptly...The older the Eggplant, the tougher the skin...Store in a crisper drawer in a paper bag to draw away moisture or wrap tightly in plastic wrap and store in the refrigerator.

Women in the Orient used to use the peel of the Eggplant as dye to stain their teeth gray because that was the rage.

Eggplant can be salted and then drained for 30 minutes to draw out some of the moisture...Since Eggplant is like a sponge and will soak up oil, the purging will help it not soak up quite as much oil...Just slice, lay on a cookie cooling rack over the sink, sprinkle liberally with salt, let

sit for an hour, turn and repeat...You can let them sit for 3 or more hours...Then rinse to get off all the salt and squeeze to ring out all the moisture...Towel dry and you're ready to use!

There are many varieties of Eggplant which range from dark purple to pale mauve, and from yellow to white...Varieties of Eggplant include Chinese purple, globular, Japanese and Italian Rosa Bianco...The longer purple variety is the most commonly eaten...It is one of the more popular vegetables in the world, and it is a staple of Italian cooking throughout Italy...For hundreds of years, it was grown only in Sicily and southern Italy.

Never eat raw Eggplant since it contains the toxin solanine...Solanine is destroyed by cooking.

Eggplant fruit are harvested at a range of developmental stages...Depending on cultivar and temperature, the time from flowering to harvest may be 10 to 40 days...Generally fruit are harvested immature before seeds begin to significantly enlarge and harden...Firmness and external glossiness are also indicators of a pre-maturity condition...Eggplant fruit become pithy and bitter as they reach an overmature condition...

The dark purple Eggplants are the most common type sold commercially in the United States...They weigh about 1 to 5 pounds each and come in two shapes: oval and elongated. The elongated variety is often referred to as the Japanese or oriental Eggplant.

Specialty varieties include miniature Eggplants that come in a variety of colors and shapes...Deep purple, round or oval Eggplants are often nicknamed Italian or baby Eggplants...Pale violet Eggplant, usually slim and light, is nicknamed Chinese Eggplant...Violet-white are Italian rosa biancos...Japanese Eggplants are younger versions of the large commercial purple type.

When you press gently on an Eggplant, the finger mark will disappear quickly if the Eggplant is fresh. Eggplant should feel heavy; one that feels light for its size may not have a good flavor. The stem and cap should be bright green.

Wash the Eggplant just before using it, and cut off the cap and stem...Use a stainless steel knife because carbon blades will discolor the Eggplant...Eggplant may be cooked with or without its skin...However, large Eggplant and most white varieties have thick, tough skin and should be peeled prior to cooking with a vegetable peeler.

Unlike many vegetables, Eggplant is not harmed by long cooking...An undercooked Eggplant can have a chewy texture; but overcooked Eggplant is just very soft...Do not cook in an aluminum pot because the Eggplant will become discolored.

Spices that enhance its flavor include allspice, basil, bay leaves, garlic, chili powder, oregano, sage, thyme, marjoram, and parsley...Eggplant is most often paired with tomatoes or onions.

According to an Australian study, Eggplant absorbs more fat in cooking than any other vegetable...When researchers deep-fried a serving of Eggplant, they found that it absorbed 83 grams of fat in just 70 seconds—four times as much as an equal portion of potatoes—adding more than 700 calories...Try one of the many other cooking options instead of frying or sautéing.

Sprinkle minced garlic and herbs over Eggplant slices before grilling for extra taste...Add Eggplant to lasagna to add color, taste, and texture...Blend Eggplant to spinach dips or other vegetable dips...Add Eggplant to vegetable soups to for a heartier texture...Grill Eggplant,

and add it to your favorite sandwich...Try Eggplant seasoned and mashed or pureed as a dip with pita bread.

Kurt Nolte is an area agriculture agent with the Yuma County Cooperative Extension. He can be reached at 928-726-3904.