

Eggplant

The only member of the Nightshade family that isn't native to the New World. It originates in Africa. From there it spread to South Asia and Europe, producing a great many colors, shapes, and textures. Eggplant is an excellent source of dietary fiber, and potassium.



above: Asian Eggplant

TIPS:

Short-term Storage: Keep eggplant outside of the refrigerator and use within a few days.

Long-term Storage: Roast and freeze.

General Cooking Info: Some people find eggplant to be bitter. If this is the case it is good to toss cubed eggplant in salt and let sit to extract some of the bitter juices before cooking. Eggplant requires a large amount of fat in the form of oil or butter to cook to pleasant consistency. Don't be stingy with the grease! Roasting, baking and stewing are great methods to use on eggplant.

Growing info: Eggplant likes similar growing conditions as tomatoes. We grow them in much the same way.

Common Problems: Fungal problems are usually not an issue as in tomatoes. Flea Beetles love eggplant leaves. They will devour plants to the point of death if given the chance. We use row covers and pyrethrum to control them.

Varieties: Two main types we grow are Asian and Italian

Asian: Usually long and slender with a decidedly meatier texture compared to Italian varieties. Great roasted whole, for babaganoush recipes.

Italian: "Standard" teardrop shaped purple eggplants. Also come in white and speckled varieties.



Eggplants come in all shapes, colors, and sizes

Eggplant Parmesan

3 eggplant, peeled and thinly sliced
 2 eggs, beaten
 4 cups Italian seasoned bread crumbs
 6 cups spaghetti sauce, divided
 1 (16 ounce) package mozzarella cheese, shredded and divided
 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese, divided
 1/2 teaspoon dried basil

- 1.Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C).
- 2.Dip eggplant slices in egg, then in bread crumbs. Place in a single layer on a baking sheet. Bake in preheated oven for 5 minutes on each side.
- 3.In a 9x13 inch baking dish spread spaghetti sauce to cover the bottom. Place a layer of eggplant slices in the sauce. Sprinkle with mozzarella and Parmesan cheeses. Repeat with remaining ingredients, ending with the cheeses. Sprinkle basil on top.
- 4.Bake in preheated oven for 35 minutes, or until golden brown.

from Allrecipes.com

Roasted Eggplant and Mushrooms

1 medium eggplant, peeled and cubed
 2 small zucchini, cubed
 1/2 small yellow onion, chopped
 1 (8 ounce) package mushrooms, sliced
 1 1/2 tablespoons tomato paste
 1/2 cup water
 1 clove garlic, minced
 1/2 teaspoon dried basil
 salt and pepper to taste

- 1.Preheat oven to 450 degrees F (230 degrees C).
- 2.Place eggplant, zucchini, onion and mushrooms in a 2 quart casserole dish. In a small bowl combine the tomato paste with the water, and stir in garlic, basil, salt and pepper. Pour over the vegetables and mix well.
- 3.Bake in preheated oven for 45 minutes, or until eggplant is tender, stirring occasionally. Add water as necessary if vegetables begin to stick; however, vegetables should be fairly dry, with slightly browned edges.

from allrecipes.com

Ratatouille

2 1/2 lb tomatoes (4 large)
 8 large garlic cloves, thinly sliced
 1 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
 20 fresh basil leaves, torn in half
 1 cup plus 2 T extra-virgin olive oil
 2 lb eggplant, cut into 1-inch cubes
 2 large onions (1 1/2 lb total), quartered lengthwise and thinly sliced crosswise
 3 assorted bell peppers (green, red, and/or yellow; 1 1/2 lb total), cut into 1-inch pieces
 4 medium zucchini (2 lb), quartered lengthwise and cut crosswise into 3/4-inch-thick pieces
 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
 2 1/4 teaspoons salt

Cut an X in bottom of each tomato with a sharp paring knife and blanch together in a 4-quart pot of boiling water 1 minute. Transfer tomatoes with a slotted spoon to a cutting board and, when cool enough to handle, peel off skin, beginning from scored end, with paring knife.

Coarsely chop tomatoes and transfer to a 5-quart heavy pot with garlic, parsley, basil, and 1/3 cup oil. Simmer, partially covered, stirring occasionally, until tomatoes break down and sauce is slightly thickened, about 30 minutes.

While sauce is simmering, toss eggplant with 1/2 teaspoon salt in a large colander and let stand in sink 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, cook onions in 3 tablespoons oil with 1/4 teaspoon salt in a 12-inch heavy skillet over moderate heat, stirring occasionally, until softened, 10 to 12 minutes. Transfer onions with a slotted spoon to a large bowl, then add 3 tablespoons oil to skillet and cook bell peppers with 1/4 teaspoon salt over moderate heat, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 10 minutes. Transfer peppers with slotted spoon to bowl with onions. Add 3 tablespoons oil to skillet and cook zucchini with 1/4 teaspoon salt over moderate heat, stirring occasionally, until just tender, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer zucchini with slotted spoon to bowl with other vegetables.

While zucchini are cooking, pat eggplant dry with paper towels. Add remaining oil (about 1/4 cup) to skillet and cook eggplant over moderate heat, stirring occasionally, until softened, 10 to 12 minutes.

Add vegetables, remaining teaspoon salt, and black pepper to tomato sauce and simmer, covered, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are very tender, about 1 hour. Cool, uncovered, and serve warm or at room temperature. *f*

rom www.epicurious.com