



CARING FOR YOUR VEGETABLE PLANTS: EGGPLANT

The standard eggplant produces egg-shaped, glossy, purple-black fruit 7 to 10 inches long when fully mature. Only a few plants are needed to meet the average family's needs. The long, slender Japanese eggplant has a thinner skin and more delicate flavor. Both standard and miniature eggplants can be grown successfully in containers, but standard varieties yield a better crop.

Plant and handle eggplant in the same way as tomatoes; eggplant is slightly more sensitive to cold than tomatoes. Warm to hot weather throughout the season is necessary for good production. Cold temperatures will stop plant and root growth, reducing plant vigor and yields. Using hot caps or row covers protects plants from cold conditions. Though eggplants do well in hot weather, they must have well-drained soil and do not thrive in very humid areas.

Transplanting

Eggplant likes a fertile soil. For an extra boost at planting time, you can put a handful of compost or a teaspoon of 5-10-10 fertilizer, mixed with some soil, into the bottom of the hole and then cover with one to two inches of soil to protect roots from getting burned. Alternatively, an application of 1 to 2 cups of diluted fertilizer solution may help each plant as a starter fertilizer. Place plants approximately 2 feet apart in rows that are 3 feet apart. Make planting holes large enough so the roots are not crowded. Be sure to firm, but not pack, the soil around the roots. Water the plants well immediately.



Watering

Proper watering is very important. Drip irrigation or furrow irrigation on raised beds, instead of using sprinklers, will keep your soils well drained and protect against diseases such as root rot. Keep the root zone moist throughout the growing season. One or two waterings during the first month will help establish the plant. Peppers and eggplants root to about 2 feet deep and plants should not be subject to water stress. Stress during the bloom can cause substantial reduction in fruit set and stress during early fruit growth can induce blossom end rot in peppers. Keep adequate moisture in the deeper soil layers even when plants are small. Deep moisture is harder to replace later in the growing season without over irrigating.

Fertilizing

Eggplant is a heavy feeder, but they are also picky eaters. They like small amounts of food all season long. Too much nitrogen will produce lots of foliage but not much in the way of fruits. Feed every week or two with fish fertilizer or a half-strength liquid fertilizer.

Harvesting

Pick fruits when they are about 4 to 6 inches in diameter. Test for maturity by pressing with the thumb. If the flesh springs back, the fruit is green; if it does not and an indentation remains, the fruit is mature. Harvest when the fruit is about halfway between these stages. Mature fruit should not be left on the plant because they will reduce overall productivity. Use a knife or pruning shears to cut fruit from the plant.

Pest Management

Thorough information on pest management can be read at:

<http://www.ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/GARDEN/VEGES/eggplant.html>.