

August 8, 2018



Tips for Hand Pollinating Eggplant
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I must admit that one of the reasons I like to grow eggplant in my garden is its glossy purple fruit is so pretty. It's not a vegetable I cook with as a couple of my family members tried it and realized they were allergic to it (well, that's the excuse they used but maybe they just didn't like my cooking!!). However, I get a lot of satisfaction sharing my homegrown eggplant with friends and neighbors, and I think it looks pretty in a bowl on my kitchen counter.

Last year I noticed quite a bit of blossom drop on my eggplant - the plants produced flowers but they would shrivel and fall from the plant without producing any fruit buds. I consulted the UC Davis Vegetable Research and Information Center online and found that insufficient water and lack of pollination are the most likely culprits for eggplant blossom drop. Knowing that my eggplant received plenty of water, it seemed that pollination issues were to blame for the empty bowl on my counter.

So how does an eggplant pollinate? The answer is that the eggplant is self pollinating due to its "perfect" or "complete" flowers. Perfect flowers contain both anthers (which produce pollen) and pistils (which receive the pollen). With the help of a pollinator, such as air flow generated by a light breeze or the movement of flying insects, the pollen shifts from the anthers to the pistils inside the flower to complete pollination. Last summer, I noticed very little breeze and a lack of pollinator insects in my garden during the time my eggplant were blossoming, so I decided to hand pollinate the eggplant flowers.

There are several methods for hand pollinating these flowers, but the easiest is to gently tap the flowers a few times when they are open. You can even say "There, there, good flower," but it's not really necessary.... Another easy method is to insert a cotton swab or fine artist's paint brush in to the flower to move the pollen around. I even found a suggestion online to use a battery powered toothbrush and turn it on and hold next to each flower for a few seconds, but that just seemed a little extreme to me.

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Whichever method you choose, it's best to hand pollinate eggplant in the morning, when the flowers are fully open. Be sure to tap the flowers daily when they are in bloom. Within a few days of all my flower tapping, I was pleased to see that my efforts paid off - the eggplant flowers closed after blooming and stayed on the plant, and then small buds developed. I was soon rewarded with a full bowl of gleaming purple fruit on my counter.

One of the most helpful things you can do to help pollination in your garden is to plant pollinator-friendly plants. A useful article from the UC Davis Arboretum contains several tips for creating a pollinator garden at <http://publicgarden.ucdavis.edu/public-garden/creating-a-diy-pollinator-garden>. Also be sure to check out the El Dorado County Master Gardener's Sherwood Demonstration Garden for displays of pollinator friendly plants in the Butterfly and Native gardens. For more information on the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, go to http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden/

Two vegetable garden classes are coming up on Saturday, August 11. "Fall and Winter Vegetables" with Zack Dowell will be offered 9:00 a.m. to noon at Government Center, Bldg C – Hearing Room, 2850 Fairlane Ct, Placerville. "2nd Saturdays with Barry" continues 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, 6699 Campus Dr, Placerville. This month's focus is preserving the harvest. These classes are free.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. Visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind the Folsom Lake College-El Dorado Center. We're open 9:00 a.m. to noon, Fridays and Saturdays.

For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. You can also find us on Facebook.