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Eggplant

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Planting

- Eggplants are best started as transplants. Plant seeds at a depth of $\frac{1}{4}$ inch 6 to 8 weeks before desired planting date.
- Plant transplants between May 1 and July 1, May 10 and June 15, and May 15 and June 1 for Western, Central, and Eastern Kentucky.
- Transplants should be spaced 18 inches apart.
- If planting a container, it should contain 4-5 gallons per plant.

Care and Harvest

- Water about 1 inch per week (including rain). Take extra care to uniformly supply water from flowering to harvest.
- An additional 5 tablespoons of a high nitrogen fertilizer per 10 ft of row can be applied after first fruit set.
- Eggplants are ready for harvest 50-60 days after the seeds were planted. Removing mature fruit quickly can encourage more production.
- Harvest before they lose their glossy color. This, and dark seeds are signs of over maturity, which can mean that the eggplant has a spongy texture.
- Cut fruit from the plant so that the branches are not damaged.
- Eggplant bruise easily, so handle them carefully.



Storage and Use

- Eggplants can be stored in the refrigerator, but it can lead to browning and off-flavors
- Store in a cool place outside the refrigerator for up to 1 week.
- Eggplant is ethylene sensitive, so it should not be stored with ethylene producing fruit such as apples, bananas, and peaches.
- To freeze, slice into 1/4-1/3 in thick pieces and blanch for 4 minutes. Adding 1 cup of lemon juice to each gallon of blanching water can keep the eggplant from browning.

References

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RECIPE: BABA GHANOUSH (ROASTED EGGPLANT DIP)

With a knife pierce in several places each:

- 3 medium eggplants (about 4 pounds)

Preheat oven to 400°F. Place on baking sheet and roast until skins are dark mahogany in color and flesh feel soft, 45-60 min. OR roast the eggplants on a grill or open flame. Let stand until cool enough to handle. Split the eggplants. Scoop the flesh into a colander, and press to extract excess liquid. Transfer to a food processor and add:

- 2 tablespoons tahini (sesame paste)
- 1 to 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons salt

Pulse until smooth. Taste and adjust the lemon juice and salt. Transfer to a shallow serving bowl and garnish with:

- Stir in ½ cup yogurt-optional
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped parsley
- Pitted olives- optional

Serve with warm pita bread or pita chips.

Makes about 3 cups