



**Grow A Row!**  
(or Grow a Square!)



# Today in the Garden!

**“About Those Eggplants – Planting, Growing, Recipes” and pick up free eggplant seedlings for your home garden!**

## RODALE'S OrganicLife

### The Secret To Growing The Most Flavorful Eggplants

*This ancient fruit grows in an astonishing variety of colors and shapes, but the real secret to getting the best taste is timing.*

The range of sizes, shapes, and colors of the heat-loving eggplant (*Solanum melongena*) tells the story of its enduring popularity. Native to India, where it grows wild, it has been cultivated in Southeast Asia for thousands of years. Europe was introduced to the vegetable in the 8th century via the Moors, who brought it to Spain, Sicily, and southern France via North Africa. In the sunny, dry climate of the Mediterranean basin, eggplant found the warm growing conditions it prefers and soon found its way into the classic cuisines of the region. (Whether you're starting your first garden or switching to organic, Rodale's Basic Organic Gardening has all the answers and advice you need—get your copy today!)

A classic eggplant is deep purple and pear-shaped, but when you grow your own, you can try a cornucopia of other colors and shapes, from elongated lavender and white 'Fairy Tale' to snow white 'Snowy' to round violet-blushed 'Rosa Bianca'. But to succeed with eggplants, you'll need to supply them with steadily warm growing conditions for at least three months. Eggplants growing in cold soil or exposed to chilly weather will sulk and are more prone to insect and disease problems.

#### Planting Eggplant

Give eggplants a head start on the growing season by starting them indoors, 6 to 9 weeks before the average last frost. Soak seeds overnight to encourage germination; sow them ¼ inch deep in a loose, fine medium, such as vermiculite. Use bottom heat to maintain a soil temperature of 80° to 90°F for the 8 to 10 days required for sprouting. Transplants are above individual pots once they reach 3 inches. When outside nighttime air temperatures are above 50°F, gradually expose them to the outdoors to harden them off. Keep transplanting your seedlings into larger pots as you wait for both outdoor air and soil to warm up to at least 70°F.

Try growing eggplants in raised beds, which heat up quickly in spring. Plants given plenty of room are healthier and more productive, so space them 2½ to 3 feet apart in all directions. Water well, pour 1 to 2 cups of compost tea around each plant, and firm the soil gently.

#### Growing Eggplants

Eggplants are also good for container growing, with one plant per 5-gallon pot. Mulch immediately after transplanting, and gently hand pull any invading weeds. Interplant an early crop, such as lettuce, between the eggplant transplants. When the first set of flowers emerge, pinch them off. In addition to making the plant develop several fruiting branches, this

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### Home Gardening Series Eggplant

#### Environment

Light – sunny  
Soil – well-drained  
pH – 6.0-7.0  
Temperature – warm



#### Cultural Practices

**Planting Time**  
Eggplant is best started by transplanting, and it is important to get the plant off to a proper start. Select plants that have well-developed roots in the soil ball. Do not plant in cold soil. The soil should be warmed and the danger of frost passed. Eggplants are more susceptible than tomatoes to root injury from late frosts.