



How to Grow Eggplant

Eggplant is a member of the Solanaceae family, along with peppers and tomatoes. It comes in a surprising variety of sizes, shapes, and colors. To perform in Colorado eggplant is best grown from transplants. It does not tolerate even a light frost, and the weather must be warm throughout the growing cycle, so do not be in a hurry to plant outside. Eggplant grows well in containers that are at least 16" tall and wide. Dark colored containers help accumulate heat in cool climates.

At a Glance

Size: 24"-30"

Sun: Full

Soil: Garden-Fertile, well-drained

Pots: Good quality potting soil

Water: Heavy

Fertilizer: In the garden every 6 weeks during the growing season, in containers as needed.

Where to plant: Eggplant's most pressing need is steady warmth, so a protected, southern exposure is ideal. Choose a location where other members of the Solanaceae family (eggplants, tomatoes, potatoes, peppers) have not been grown for at least 2 years. In the garden, work in a generous amount of compost prior to planting, along with a balanced organic fertilizer. Warm the soil with black plastic about two weeks before planting. Use a good quality potting soil for container growing, and use fresh soil each year.

When to plant: Eggplant prefers daytime temperatures above 70° and nighttime temperatures above 60°. Most Front Range gardeners plant starter plants around June 1, depending on weather, or when soil temperature is consistently 50°-55°. Space plants 18-24 inches apart. Use care when transplanting as eggplant is sensitive to transplant shock. Eggplant does not usually need to be staked unless very large, heavy fruits are grown.

How to Grow: Once plants are in the garden, use floating row covers to provide steady heat and protect the plants from pests. The row covers can stay on from transplant to harvest since eggplants do not need insects for pollination. Side dress with a balanced granular fertilizer every 6 weeks during the growing season. If growing eggplant in a container, fertilize as much as needed to maintain steady growth and good leaf color.

Harvest fruits any time after they have reached half their mature size. Smaller fruit taste better, and frequent harvesting stimulates the plant to produce more fruit. Use pruning shears to harvest the fruit to avoid damaging the plant stem. Eggplant can be stored in the refrigerator for no more than three days before cooking or preserving.