

Snohomish County Master Gardener Eggplant

Hort Short

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Eggplant like the heat

Eggplant is a warm-season vegetable that grows best in regions that are warmer and have a longer growing season. In the cooler areas, gardeners should consider growing short-season eggplant cultivars and keeping them warm to be successful.

Eggplant Types

- The large oval-fruited eggplant with purple skin
- The Oriental or Asian elongated type with purple skin
- Novelty types with fruit of various sizes, shapes, and colors, including white, lavender, green, yellow, orange, and red

Planting

- Before planting, have your garden soil tested and follow the recommendations for proper fertilization before planting.
- Eggplant grows best in a planting site that provides full sun and fertile, well-drained, slightly acidic soil with a high level of organic matter. They will tolerate less favorable soil conditions.
- Eggplant is typically started from transplants because the growing season is so long.
 - 100 to 150 days from seed; 55 to 85 days from transplants
- Larger transplants, about six to eight inches tall and grown in individual pots, will give you a head start on eggplant's long growing season.
- The soil should be at least 60°F.
- Consider planting eggplant in raised beds or covering the soil with black plastic mulch several weeks before planting. Remove the plastic at planting time and reuse it next season.
- After planting, provide the plants with more heat by using hot caps, cloches, spun fiber row covers, plastic covered cages, or other garden devices that retain heat.
- If planting in rows, place eggplant transplants 24" apart with rows 36" apart.
- If planting in raised beds space plants 24 inches apart.
- If planting in containers, choose cultivars with compact plants. Each plant requires a minimum two-gallon pot.

Plant Maintenance

- Fertilize with a nitrogen fertilizer once during the growing season.
- Apply a 21-0-0 fertilizer to the plants when the fruit first starts to form.
 - Use a rate of 1 1/2 teaspoons per plant applied to the soil near the base of the plant.
 - Apply an additional application of fertilizer if the plants are under heavy irrigation or have a very wet growing season.
- Eggplant requires about one to two inches of water per week during the growing season.
- Maintain an evenly moist soil watering deeply only as needed.
- Apply organic mulch after the soil warms up to help conserve soil moisture and reduce weeds.
- Eggplant is pollinated by bees. Encourage wild bees and other pollinating insects in your garden by planting pollinator-attracting flowers nearby.

Disease and Pest Management - IPM considerations

Note: Please refer to the resources listed below for pictures

- Curly Top Virus - A virus found mostly in eastern Washington spreads to plants by leafhoppers carrying the disease. Symptoms include puckering and downward curling of leaves. The plants then turn yellow and die. Older plants may only show yellowing and stunted growth. Leaves are thick and brittle. Corrective actions are to remove and destroy infected plants; discourage leafhoppers by shading plants.
- Verticillium Wilt - A soil-borne fungus disease found in Washington soils that enters through roots and plugs a plant's vascular system, which conducts water and nutrients throughout the plant. The first symptoms are the yellowing of the lower leaves and stunted plant growth, followed by wilting from the base of the plant upward. Nothing can be done to save an infected plant. Diseased plants should be removed and discarded without composting.
- Flea Beetle - Symptoms include small, round holes on the leaves early in the season when the plants are small. Flea beetle larvae also feed on the underground parts of the plant. Corrective action is to discourage the beetles by removing weeds in and around the garden.
- Whitefly - Symptoms include leaves wilting, turning yellow, then brown. Whiteflies feed on the undersides of leaves, sucking sap from plant tissues. A sign of their presence is a cloud of very small moth-like flies disbursing when the plant is disturbed. Corrective actions are to carefully check any transplants, (especially greenhouse grown), to avoid introducing them into your garden. Protect beneficial insects that feed on the whitefly by not using broad-spectrum insecticides.
- Aphids - Symptoms include curled infested leaves around the aphid and honeydew, a sticky shiny substance excreted by the aphids on the leaves. Corrective action is to wash the Aphids from the plants with a strong stream of water.

Resources:

Growing Eggplant in Home Gardens, Washington State University Publication

<https://pubs.extension.wsu.edu/growing-eggplant-in-home-gardens-home-garden-series>

WSU Hortsense Fact Sheets for pest issues:

<http://hortsense.cahnr.wsu.edu/Search/SearchByPlantCategory.aspx>

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