

Egg Plant (Aubergine)

(Solanum melongena)

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Egg plants can be planted all year round. Plant out on ridges or hills (30-50 cm high) if grown during the Wet to facilitate drainage and reduce water logging. During the Wet due to high temperatures and humidity the egg plant tends to produce more vegetative growth and yields are lower. They also take longer to reach maturity. Sow seeds about 1 cm deep in containers, e.g. peat pellets. Starting 2 weeks after germination, the seedlings should be given a weekly application of water soluble fertiliser to promote healthy growth. The seedlings should be hardened off a week or so before planting out by reducing the amount and frequency of watering. When the seedlings reach 10-12 cm high (6-8 weeks) they are planted out into rows 45 cm between plants and 90 cm - 1 m between rows. Always plant out in the late afternoon or on a overcast day. Two or three plants should provide enough egg fruit for the average family over a considerable period. The plants can be staked as a precaution against wind damage. The stakes need only be 1 m in length and should be pushed about 30 cm deep into the ground 5-8 cm from the plant at transplanting time. This reduces the chance of damaging the roots of the plant later on.



FERTILISER

Well rotted animal manure or compost, if available, should be worked into the soil at about 5-10 kg/m². A complete fertiliser mix (high in phosphate) should be incorporated into the row at 70 g/mm² before planting. A side dressing of the same fertiliser mix is given every three weeks or so at 20-30 g/plant.

For more details on fertilisation, trace elements and soil conditioning see Agnotes on "Vegetable Fertiliser Guide for Top End Gardeners" and "Improving Soil Structure and pH Levels in Top End Horticultural Soils".

WATERING

Regular, thorough waterings are advisable to keep the soil moist at all times. Stress due to lack of water can cause flower drop. During hot dry weather mulching under the plants using dry lawn cuttings, etc. helps conserve moisture. If green material, e.g. lawn cuttings are used for mulching some additional nitrogen fertiliser may be necessary. Care must be taken when mulching to keep the mulch at least 5 to 7 cm clear of the stem.

HARVESTING

The first fruits should be ready for picking about 2½ months from transplanting, and may continue for 4 months. Fruits should be picked when they reach about 2/3 full size. If allowed to reach maturity they lose flavour and become tough skinned. Harvesting all the fruit when they reach this size promotes higher yields. The fruit should be cut from the plant using a sharp knife.

PESTS

Aphids can sometimes be a pest and can be controlled by spraying with dimethoate or maldison using manufacturers recommendations. Caterpillars can be controlled with endosulfan or carbaryl sprays if necessary.

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