



Eggplant!

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Eggplant stands out for its deep purple color in the garden or produce aisle. Besides color, eggplant also provides many important nutrients. Eggplant is botanically classified as a fruit but is used as a vegetable on menus.

Growing

Eggplant thrives in warm weather. Sow seeds indoors 6 to 8 weeks before transplanting outdoors or purchase seedlings from greenhouses. Transplant the seedlings to the garden when the nighttime temperatures warm up to greater than 50 degrees Fahrenheit.

Place the plants in a row 18 inches apart with 30 inches separating the rows. Eggplant also can be planted in raised beds with similar spacing. Use plastic mulch to generate heat during the growing season.

Plant supports can assist the stem as the plant grows taller. A tomato cage can be placed around the plant at the time of planting.

Eggplant should receive about 1 inch of water a week to prevent blossom-end rot and/or shallow root development. Maintaining a consistent soil moisture level is the best way to ensure strong fruit development.

Harvesting

Harvest the eggplant when it reaches a desired size and maturity according to the variety. Use garden shears to cut the fruit from the plant to prevent damage that may occur if ripping off the eggplant. Cover the plant when frost is expected in fall to extend the harvest season.

Nutrition

One cup of eggplant has 20 calories, 0 g fat, 5 g carbohydrate, 1 g protein, 3 g fiber, 10% recommended daily intake (RDI) of manganese, 5% RDI folate, 5% RDI potassium, as well as vitamin K and C.

Storing and Preserving

For best results, keep eggplant at room temperature for no longer than four days and in the refrigerator for about five days. Cut eggplant should be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator. Freezing is not recommended for quality purposes, but it can be done by blanching and freezing sliced eggplant.

Preparing

Eggplant can be enjoyed roasted, grilled or sauteed. It can be added to dishes such as stir fry, lasagna and salad. Before using eggplant in any form, make sure to rinse it thoroughly under cool, running water.

- Roast eggplant chunks at 450 degrees Fahrenheit for 20 minutes.
- Grill sliced eggplant over medium-high heat for two to three minutes on each side.
- Saute eggplant over medium heat until caramelized on all sides.

Pro tip: Keep the skin on the eggplant. It is an excellent source of fiber and antioxidants.



Recipes

Key to abbreviations

c. = cup

tsp. = teaspoon

Tbsp. = tablespoon

oz. = ounce

lb. = pound(s)

g = gram

mg = milligram



Eggplant Side Dish

- 1 small eggplant, cubed (about a pound)
- 1 c. chopped celery
- ½ c. chopped onion
- ½ c. chopped green pepper
- ¼ c. butter or margarine
- 1 8-oz. can of tomato sauce
- 1 c. cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1½ c. coarsely crushed corn chips

Preheat oven to 350 F. In a large skillet or saucepan, cook the eggplant, celery, onion and green pepper in butter or margarine until tender (about 15 minutes). Stir in the tomato sauce, cheese and a cup of the crushed corn chips. Place in 1½–quart casserole. Cover and bake until heated thoroughly (about 25 to 30 minutes). Before serving, arrange remaining half-cup of corn chips around the outer edge of the casserole.

Makes six (1-c.) servings.

Each serving has 300 calories, 22 g fat, 7 g protein, 22 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber and 380 mg sodium.



Ratatouille

- ¼ c. olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 onion, sliced
- 1 green pepper, seeded and cut in strips
- 3 medium zucchini, cut in ¼-inch slices
- 1 medium eggplant, cubed
- 2 tsp. dried basil
- 1 tsp. dried oregano
- 1½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. black pepper
- 3 tomatoes, cut in wedges

Heat oil in large skillet; add garlic, onion, green pepper and zucchini. Cook about three minutes or until onion is tender, stirring frequently. Add eggplant, herbs and seasonings and then cover and cook over medium heat for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add tomato wedges; cover and cook five for minutes longer or until tomatoes are heated. Serve hot or cold.

Makes 10 (1-c.) servings.

Each serving has 60 calories, 4.5 g fat, 1 g protein, 5 g carbohydrates, 1 g fiber and 270 mg sodium.



Fall Veggie Skillet

- 3 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, chopped
- 1 medium eggplant
- 4 tomatoes
- 1 green or red pepper
- 1 onion
- 1 tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. black pepper
- 2 Tbsp. grated Parmesan cheese
- Optional seasonings (basil, oregano)

Cut the eggplant into cubes. Chop the tomatoes into small pieces. Cut the green pepper in half. Remove the seeds and cut it into small pieces. Chop the onion into small pieces. Cut the garlic into tiny pieces. Heat the oil and garlic in a skillet. Add vegetables and seasonings and saute until tender. Top with Parmesan cheese and serve. Add tomatoes just before done.

Makes six (1-c.) servings.

Each serving has 120 calories, 8 g fat, 2 g protein, 13 g carbohydrates, 3 g fiber and 470 mg sodium.

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