

## **SEASONAL INGREDIENT: EGGPLANT**

Susan Denzer, Chef and Culinary Consultant  
Love + Craft Kitchen, LLC  
[www.loveandcraftkitchen.com](http://www.loveandcraftkitchen.com)

love + craft

KITCHEN

*What do Aubergine, Melongene, Guinea Squash and Brinjal all have in common?  
They are all names for Eggplant.*



Photo: Love+Craft Kitchen

If you've visited a Farmers Market recently you probably have seen one or more varieties of beautiful, glossy eggplant. Peak season is in August and September yet it is readily available year-round in grocery stores.

It's long and somewhat rocky history is traced to before the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC in India and China with some extremely bitter, wild varieties rumored to cause insanity and diseases. Less bitter strains were developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century at which time eggplant rose to a place of honor. Today, eggplant is a staple ingredient in many types of cuisine particularly Mediterranean, European, Indian, Asian, Middle Eastern and African, and the leading growers include Turkey, Egypt, Italy, China and Japan.

Most commonly recognized are the deep purple, pear-shaped variety found in grocery stores, with lesser known options in lavender, white, green, striped, speckled, elongated, curved or round. Just for fun, check out ["A Visual Guide to 8 Glorious Varieties of Eggplant"](#) by The Kitchn and ["The Ultimate Eggplant Varieties Guide"](#) by Open Eats. And, challenge yourself to find a new variety to try this season!

Eggplants provide some amazing and unique health benefits as they contain powerful antioxidants (chlorogenic acid and nasunin) along with fiber, vitamins A, B1, B6, C and K, copper, manganese, zinc, iron, potassium, folate and calcium, all of which:

- help build strong bones
- prevent or reduce anemia
- increase cognition
- improve heart health
- aid digestion
- help manage or prevent diabetes

NOTE: Eggplants are part of the nightshade family which may cause inflammation or allergic reactions in some people usually when eaten in larger quantities. Consult with your physician and/or a qualified nutritionist if you have concerns.

### **SELECT**

When selecting an eggplant, look for one that is:

- firm and springs back when gently pressed
- slightly heavy for its size
- glossy with vivid color
- smooth skinned without scars, soft brown spots, wrinkles or cuts on the surface

Smaller eggplants tend to be sweeter while having less seeds and more tender skins.

## **STORE**

Eggplants are quite perishable so should be used or properly prepared for longer term storage soon after purchase. Fresh eggplant can be wrapped in a paper towel and stored in the refrigerator for up to four days. Cooked eggplant is best if covered tightly, stored in the refrigerator and used within 3 - 4 days.

For instructions on freezing eggplant, see:

- [“The Best Way to Freeze Eggplant”](#) by The Kitchn.
- [“How to Freeze Eggplant”](#) by The Spruce Eats

## **USE**

Technically, eggplant is a fruit, but it is commonly thought of and used as a vegetable. Different varieties of eggplant can vary slightly in taste but are generally mildly sweet, sometimes with a touch of bitter. Eggplant pairs well with many other foods such as tomatoes, peppers, other vegetables, garlic, lemon, beans and lentils, meat, herbs and warm spices.

### ***How do I prepare thee? Let me count the ways...***

Eggplant is quite versatile! It tends to take on and compliment the other flavors of the dish, and can be cooked in almost any fashion - roast, grill, bake, steam, stuff, sauté, stir-fry, stew, or lightly pan-fry. Eggplant is wonderful used in dips, added to soups, salads, stews and casseroles, on pizza, in wraps and sandwiches or with pasta.

Preparation Tips:

- Always remember to wash the outside of the eggplant gently but thoroughly, and pat dry with a paper towel before cutting.
- Eggplants are like sponges and can absorb large amounts of oil so being mindful of that is important.
  - Lightly brushing eggplant slices or cubes before roasting, grilling or baking is a good technique.
  - For sautéing or pan-frying, use only 1 - 2 tablespoons of oil in the bottom of the skillet.
- Larger eggplants may have tough skins which can be peeled before cooking. Or, depending on how it will be used, bake the whole eggplant with the skin on, cut in half and scoop out the creamy center once it cools.
- If not cooking an eggplant whole, cut off and discard the end and the stem before halving, slicing or dicing.
- “Sweating” the eggplant with salt prior to cooking can reduce the bitterness. To do so, cut the eggplant into desired the shape and spread out on to a paper towel or in a strainer or colander. Allow the eggplant to “sweat” over a plate or bowl (liquid may drain off the eggplant) for 30 - 60 minutes. Rinse the eggplant thoroughly in a strainer or colander. Pat dry and prepare as desired.

### ***Cooking Basics:***

Use a specific recipe or follow these basic guidelines for cooking eggplant.

**BAKE:**

Whole

- Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Place entire eggplant in a baking dish and place into the oven. Bake for approximately 30 minutes, until center is soft when poked with a sharp knife.
- Remove from oven and allow to cool slightly. Slice the eggplant in half and scoop out the soft center for use in dips or other soft applications. Discard the skin.

Sliced

- Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Slice cleaned eggplant either lengthwise or crosswise in ½ inch slices.

- Lay slices flat on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper or foil AND sprayed with cooking spray. Brush lightly with olive or avocado oil and season lightly with salt and pepper, or as desired.
- Bake for approximately 25 minutes, or until they are lightly golden brown.

#### ROAST:

- Cut the eggplant into 1" or 2" chunks. Place chunks in a colander or strainer and salt. Allow to "sweat" for 30 - 60 minutes.
- Preheat oven to 425 degrees F. Prepare a baking pan by lining it with parchment paper or foil AND spraying it with cooking spray.
- Rinse the eggplant chunks thoroughly under cold water. Drain and pat dry.
- Spread out on the prepared baking sheet in a single layer. Drizzle lightly with olive or avocado oil and season with salt and pepper, or as desired.
- Roast the eggplant in the oven for 15 - 20 minutes, then turn the pieces over and continue roasting for another 10 - 20 minutes, until soft when poked with a fork or sharp knife and golden brown.

#### GRILL:

- Cut the eggplant into ½" slices either lengthwise or crosswise. Place slices in a colander or strainer and salt. Allow to "sweat" for 30 - 60 minutes.
- Preheat grill to medium-high.
- Rinse eggplant slices thoroughly under cold water. Drain and pat dry.
- Spread out on a platter or cutting board, brush with olive or avocado oil and season with salt and pepper, or as desired.
- Place slices on a vegetable rack for grills or directly on the grill, either one sprayed with cooking spray. Grill for 5 minutes, then turn and continue grilling another 5 - 10 minutes until golden brown and soft in the center.

#### RECIPE: [Eggplant Lasagna](#)

Eggplant makes a great stand-in for pasta and in this dish is every bit as satisfying. Enjoy!

