

EGGPLANT



EGGPLANT is part of the nightshade family and is related to other warm season vegetables such as tomatoes and peppers. There are several different types of eggplant including large purple, slender Asian, tiny white egg-shaped, striped and even red-orange eggplants! In the Northeast, eggplant is available during the hottest summer months.

STORAGE

- ◆ Eggplant is best when eaten fresh. You can **store** an eggplant for **up to one week** un-refrigerated at a cool room temperature.
- ◆ Eggplants should be **handled with care**. If they bruise, damaged cells will release an enzyme that causes the vegetable to turn brown and bitter.

PREPARATION

- ◆ Wash the eggplant. If the vegetable is very fresh, it **does not need to be peeled**. Older eggplants will develop a tougher skin so you may want to peel these. Leaving the skin on adds color and helps the cut pieces to hold their shape.
- ◆ **Do not cut the eggplant until you are ready to use it** because the inside will brown when it is exposed. The browning process can be slowed by soaking the pieces in ice water or coating them with lemon juice or vinegar.
- ◆ Eggplants absorb oil easily during cooking. To reduce the amount of oil used while cooking, cut the eggplant into chunks or rounds and **sprinkle salt over the eggplant**. Let it sit like this for 30-60 minutes. The eggplant will appear to be 'sweating'! This process also draws out any bitter juices due to chilling or age. Dry off the eggplant with a paper towel and cook as desired.
- ◆ **Try baking, stuffing, broiling, steaming, grilling, frying, roasting or sautéing your eggplant.**
- ◆ **Eggplants are excellent in dips, pasta sauces, soups, stews, casseroles and purees.**

Nutritional Information

Eggplants are low in calories but have only minimal amounts of vitamins and minerals. They are often eaten in conjunction with other, more nutrient dense foods. Eggplants are always eaten cooked because they contain a toxic substance called solanine when raw. You would need to eat an extremely large amount of raw eggplant for it to be harmful.

Eggplant Recipes

Babaganouj (ba-ba-ga-noosh)

2 large or 5 small eggplants, washed, stems and ends cut off, cut in half lengthwise
Olive oil
2 Tablespoons lemon juice
2-3 cloves garlic, crushed
4 Tablespoons tahini (sesame paste)
Salt and pepper to taste
Scallions, chopped for garnish



Preheat a broiler. Place the eggplant halves skin side up on a well-greased baking sheet and drizzle them with olive oil. Broil them in the oven for a 1/2 hour. The eggplant is done when it is very soft and the skin is slightly blackened. Scrape the insides out of the eggplant skin. Put the insides in a bowl and discard the skins. Mix the eggplant with the lemon juice, garlic and tahini. Add salt and pepper to taste. Serve with a sprinkling of scallions or chopped garlic greens. This can be eaten as a dip for vegetables or as a spread on fresh pita bread.

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Baked Eggplant with Feta Cheese

1 large or 2 medium eggplants, sliced into 1/2 inch slices
Olive oil
1/3 cup feta cheese, crumbled
Salt and pepper to taste
1/4 cup finely chopped fresh basil



Preheat the broiler. Brush the eggplant slices with olive oil and grill or broil them until they are lightly browned on one side. Turn the slices over and brush the other side with oil. Arrange the slices on an oiled baking sheet. Sprinkle the feta cheese on the slices and season with salt and pepper. Bake for 10 minutes or until the cheese is bubbly and the eggplant slices are soft. Sprinkle the fresh chopped basil over the top of the eggplant slices and serve them hot.

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Ratatouille

4 Tablespoons olive oil
2 large onions, coarsely chopped
3 cloves garlic, crushed
2 medium eggplants, cut into chunks (no larger than 1 inch)
3 large, sweet peppers, red or green, seeded and sliced
2 medium zucchini, cut into rounds
1 teaspoon dried thyme (or 1 sprig fresh thyme)
2 teaspoons dried basil leaves (or 1/4 cup fresh basil, chopped)
1-1/2 pounds ripe tomatoes, peeled and cut into chunks
Salt and pepper to taste
2 Tablespoons parsley, chopped



In a large pan heat the olive oil and add the onions and garlic. Cook them over a low flame until they are transparent (about 15 minutes). Add the eggplant, sweet pepper, zucchini, thyme and basil, cover the pan and simmer for 1/2 hour, until the vegetables are tender. Add the tomatoes and season to taste. Cook another 5 minutes. Serve sprinkled with parsley. It tastes great served warm with rice or cold with big pieces of crusty bread. This traditional Mediterranean recipe does have a lot of ingredients but it is well worth it!!

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