

EGGPLANT



INTRODUCTION

Also known as the aubergine, eggplant is very common in Southern European countries where it is highly prized. The Greek put eggplant in a traditional recipe called moussaka, the French in their traditional recipe, ratatouille, and the Turks in imam bayildi. Actually a fruit, eggplants contain many fine seeds. It has a mild taste and is typically cooked with stronger flavours such as garlic, tomatoes, onions, herbs and spices.

TYPES

Several varieties of eggplant are available in New Zealand. Skin colours range from a deep purple, almost black, to a light purple with creamy streaks to all white. Shapes are also variable, from the more commonly found pear shaped to long and thin cylindrical shapes. Growing conditions can affect the colouring, for instance a white eggplant may be all white if grown indoors but would have purple streaks if grown outdoors. By far the most commonly found variety is the deep purple pear shaped eggplant.

The large white eggplant can be eaten raw and is often served as a side dish with Thai meals. It tastes similar to beans. The Japanese eggplant, the long thin purple one, also tastes similar to a bean and is often stir-fried with oyster sauce. Even a green-yellow 'banana' eggplant can sometimes be found.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Look for glossy blemish free skin which is firm to the touch and is showing no signs of withering. Decay appears as dark brown spots on the surface and should be avoided as these eggplants will deteriorate rapidly. Eggplants should be heavy in relation to size.

HOW TO KEEP

Store at 10–12°C with 90–98% relative humidity. Lower temperatures will cause chilling damage. Eggplants are ethylene sensitive which means they should be stored separately from ethylene producing fruits and vegetables.

Consumer Storage: Refrigerate in the crisper.

NUTRITIONAL VALUE

Eggplants supply vitamins C and B group.

HOW TO PREPARE

Eggplants are normally used unpeeled. Remove the calyx. Some recipes will instruct slicing the eggplant, sprinkling with salt and leaving for 30 minutes before rinsing thoroughly. This is to drain out any bitterness, but as only very ripe eggplants tend to be bitter, this isn't usually necessary. Recently developed varieties are not bitter. Some eggplants, particularly the smaller ones, are so tender they can be eaten raw.

WAYS TO EAT THIS VEGETABLE

Eggplants can be fried, baked, grilled or steamed — whole, sliced or cubed. They go well with lamb and chicken and can be cut into chunks and barbecued on kebabs. They're great stuffed with other vegetables and meats. Try some of the traditional recipes listed above.

WHEN YOU CAN GET IT

Purple varieties are available in plentiful quantities from November until June, other varieties have a more limited supply. Imported eggplants are available in the winter months.

TIPS FOR RETAILING

Eggplants bruise easily so handle carefully. Display only one layer deep in refrigerated shelving. Many customers will be unaware of how to use eggplants, so experiment with them yourself so you can give first hand advice on preparation and recipes.