

June 2017

Eggplant – That Other Solanaceous Veggie!

When solanaceous vegetables are mentioned, everyone immediately thinks about tomato. Who wouldn't? It's the number one home garden vegetable in the U.S. and near the top in commercial production. If asked to name another, pepper usually comes to mind, sometimes potato. But few immediately think of eggplant (*Solanum melongena*). Understandable, when you look at the USDA Vegetable Production Census of Agriculture for 2017, eggplant isn't even in the report. So I want to talk about that other solanaceous veggie.

Eggplant originated in Southeast Asia and has been cultivated for over 2,000 years. Average per capita consumption in the U.S. is about 0.8 lbs (less than one medium eggplant). While eggplant fruit does not have a high concentration of any one nutrient, it does contain a large array of nutrients, a high amount of fiber, and a high concentration of anti-oxidant phenolics.

Growing eggplant, especially in the South, can be a rewarding endeavor. Eggplants love the heat. In fact, they need two or more months of nighttime temperatures near 70°F for good fruit production. They have a dramatic light green foliage and bright violet flowers. The fruit can be white, green, striped, pink or the traditional deep purple. Plants grow several feet high, depending on the variety. They prefer well-drained, slightly acidic soil with high fertility and high organic matter. However, they are tolerant of a broad range of soil conditions and will produce in almost any. They do like the sun, even

our sweltering summer solar blast, so plant them where they will get plenty. We grow them as a tender annual but they are perennial and it's not unusual for last year's plants to overwinter here. They do really well in raised beds.

Growing eggplants: Start seed indoors in January so transplants are ready to put in the garden in March or April. Even now and into July, you could still get production from putting out transplants. Plant transplants about 18 to 24 inches apart and be prepared to stake them as the plants grow, some eggplant fruit can be quite heavy and your plant will need help to keep them up off the ground. Eggplants are heavy feeders but, of course, you don't want to give them too much nitrogen or you'll get lots of leaves and little fruit. You can use a plant hormone mist, like Fruit Set, to help with fruiting if the pollinators are not doing their job.

Types: There are a number of different categories that eggplant are grouped into: Classic, Italian, Sicilian, Asian, Japanese, Turkish, Indian, White, Chinese, etc. Just grab your handy seed catalog and look for something that suits your fancy. I can honestly say I have grown at least 25 different varieties of eggplants in Louisiana and never had a failure yet.

Pests: The most common pests in our area are white flies, spider mites, Colorado potato beetle and flea beetles. In fact, these critters seem to prefer eggplant to other crops in the vegetable garden. Spray at the first sign of an infestation to prevent a population explosion. (Continued on the next page.)



Eggplant – That Other Solanaceous Veggie! (continued)

Harvesting: Eggplant fruit should be harvested young when the skin is still glossy. If left too long, the skin begins to dull indicating they are starting to ripen. That means your fruit will be seedy and could start to develop a slight bitterness. Most varieties if harvested young and used soon don't need to be peeled because the skin is tender and edible.

What to do with my fruit? While you won't find eggplant as an ingredient in gumbo, jambalaya or etouffe, there are many wonderful dishes where eggplant is the highlight – moussaka, eggplant parmigiana, grilled eggplant, battered fried eggplant, roasted eggplant, ratatouille, baba ghanoush . . . man am I getting hungry. Just check out this website: [Eggplant Recipes](#).

If you wanna give one a try I'll be glad to sample it!

~Dr. Joe Willis

June Vegetable Planting Guide

Crop	Recommended Variety	Planting	Spacing Inches	Days Until Harvest * from transplant date
Cantaloupe	Ambrosia, Aphrodite, Athena, Primo, Vienna	¼ inch	18-24	80-85
Collards	Champion, Flash, Georgia, Top Bunch, Yates	⅝ inch	6-12	75
Cucuzza	None Given	½ inch	24	65
Eggplant	Dusky, Night Shadow, Epic, Santana, Calliope	⅝ inch	18-24	80-85
Hot Peppers (transplant)	Grande, Tula, Mariachi, Mitla,	-	--	140
Luffa Gourd	None Given	½ inch	48	90
Okra	Annie Oakley, Cajun Delight, Clemson Spineless	½ inch	12	60
Peanuts	None Given	1 inch	6	130
Pumpkins	Atlantic Giant, Baby Bear, Prankster, Sorcerer	½ inch	36-60	90-120
Southern Peas	Queen Anne, California #5, Quickpick, Colussus	½ inch	4-6	70-80
Sweet Potato	Beauregard, Evangeline, Hernandez, Jewel	Special	12	90-120
Swiss Chard	None Given	¼ inch	6-8	45-55
Watermelon	Seedless: Cooperstown, Gypsy, Matrix, Millennium Seeded: Mickey Lee, Sugar Baby, Amarillo	¼ inch	48	90-110

Solarizing Gardens

Harness the Power of the Sun

Tucking your garden in under plastic during the hottest months of the year can be an excellent trick for not only cutting down on summer garden chores, but increasing your garden's health. Solarizing garden beds can help to kill weeds and weed seeds, diseases, nematodes, and insects. This "garden hack" is also great for killing grass or weeds in an area before you create a new garden bed.

Be sure that all plants that you want to keep are removed from the area. Purchase clear plastic sheeting from any home improvement store, a thickness of at least 2 millimeters is best. Clear plastic is more ideal as it works more like natural greenhouse by letting in the heat and trapping it inside. Black or solid colored plastic will work to kill grass and weeds but does not allow the heat to penetrate as deeply. A minimum of six weeks is needed to really see all of the benefits of solarization, so plan accordingly. If you are leaving for a summer vacation, this would be a great time to solarize!

Prepare garden beds by removing all plants (if possible) and thoroughly watering the soil. The water will allow for more efficient heat transfer through conduction and will create steam to sterilize the soil. For sandy or well drained soil, place a soaker hose before the plastic and irrigate when you stop seeing water drops condensed under the plastic in the mornings. Cover the soil with plastic, and weigh it down in the center and corners with bricks, cinder block, or rock. Seal the plastic down by covering all edges with soil. That is it! Solarizing captures the heat of the sun, trapping heat and cooking pests into oblivion.

School and community gardens often have difficulty finding volunteers during the summer months. Solarizing is a great way to keep gardens healthy, cut down on watering and weeding chores, and prepare soil for a successful fall. Give it a try this summer when the heat makes gardening less fun! ~Anna Timmerman

Benefits:

1. Works as an insecticide
2. Works as a fungicide.
3. Works as a pre and post emergent herbicide.
4. Totally organic!



Water the area to allow the heat to penetrate deeper and create steam.



Spread the plastic over the area.



Leave the plastic in place for 6-8 weeks.



**Your local library may
be a compost hub!**

Community composting efforts like Compost NOW can divert thousands of pounds of food waste from the landfill. Bring us your FROZEN food scraps and we will transport them to local NOLA farms to be turned into nutrient-rich compost. Compost makes our soil healthy, for growing food and retaining more water. We currently have four food waste drop-off locations at local libraries in New Orleans and hope to expand to even more sites as our program continues to grow. Libraries are trusted public spaces used by people from across all age, racial, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. They are the perfect place to learn about and engage in green behavior!

Please bring your FROZEN food scraps in a reusable or compostable container. Please do NOT drop off your food waste outside specified hours: -Fruit & Vegetable scraps (peels, pits, seeds) -Tea Bags, Coffee Grounds, Filters -Eggshells, Nut Shells, Seed Shells -Plain bread, plain pasta, plain grains (no creamy/oily dressings) NO MEAT, NO BONES, NO DAIRY

For events and more information please check our Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/CompostNewOrleansWaste/> NOTE: We will have limited hours during the summer months of July & August, with only two sites open. Please check for updates.

Drop off locations:

Saturdays-Rosa Keller Library, 10:30am - noon Alvar Library, 2-4:00pm.

Wednesdays-Carriage House Bookshop, behind Latter Library, 12-2pm Children's Resource Center Library, 5-7pm.

Super Saturday

On the first Saturday of every month, City Park hosts Super Saturday, a community volunteer event. Check City Park's Twitter, Facebook and calendar for upcoming Super Saturday dates but typically it's the first Saturday of each month.

Many groups from the community, including high schools, colleges, churches, service groups, and individuals, attend the event.

Work assignments and tools are handed out at the Volunteer Center at 9:00am, and volunteers work until noon doing various tasks, including painting, pruning, raking, mulching, planting, and maintaining areas around City Park. It's a great way to meet people from all walks of life who share a common interest in the revitalization of the Park.

Where to be: Volunteer Center at 1009 Harrison Avenue

When to be there: 8:45am (work begins promptly at 9:00am)

Who to call with questions or to sign up: Tyler at (504)483-9459

What to bring: Close-toed shoes or boots, a water bottle, sunscreen, bug spray, a brimmed hat, and snacks (if you'd like some).



Flea Beetles!?

Another Reason to Say Goodbye to Cool Season Crops

A pesky little insect almost too small for us to see, flea beetles can cause a lot of damage in your garden. Turn over those leaves, squint a bit or pull out a magnifying glass and you may just see them scampering away. Often we will see holey leaves and jump right to caterpillars, blaming the wrong culprit for the damage.

This late in the season few cool season crops should remain in your veggie plot. With hotter weather comes increased pest pressures, diseases, and just plain hard growing conditions for things like kale, collards, mustard, beets and chard.

If your Swiss chard looks like Swiss cheese, it is best to pull it and compost it. Keeping cool season crops in the garden to linger and languish all summer long tends to just roll out the buffet for flea beetles and other bad guys to feast away. Making the jump from the garden bed to ornamental plants is not a large leap, flea beetles have been known to attack gardenias, sunflowers, hostas, and other ornamental plants.

The name flea beetle encompasses a large family, but most are small, round, and black or dark in coloration. Some have stripes. They hop away when disturbed, but are in fact much larger than an actual flea. They can produce several generations per year, and they

tend to be most active on sunny, warm days.

Plants that look like they've been hit with buckshot tend to have been attacked by these bee-



A clutch of eggs with newly hatched flea beetles viewed through a microscope.

flies. Small holes throughout the leaves, especially in young transplants will be noticed. Flea beetles also create small, shallow pits that eventually turn into holes, as well as small, irregular holes less than 1/8 of an inch in diameter on more mature leaves. Heavy infestations of flea beetles can cause wilted, stunted plants and inedible leafy crops.

Controlling these pesky insects starts with preventing infestations. Good weed control is essential, since flea beetles hide and shelter in weedy patches. In colder climates they overwinter in weedy areas, but here the weeds are more of just a 24/7 safe haven. Weed-whack down those weedy patches and keep large weeds pulled in the

garden. At the botanical garden several adults plus a whole lot of eggs were found on the underside of a purslane leaf. Removing old crops from the garden as soon as they are no longer productive also helps. Surface debris like old leaves and stalks can also provide habitat, be sure to remove and compost all crop residues.

Killing flea beetles is not all that difficult to do using some common insecticides. Pyrethrins, spinosad, malathion, and carbaryl all are common active ingredients in products la-

beled for flea beetle control. Be sure to read the label of any product you are considering before purchasing it, as well as read all safety and application directions before working with it in your garden. Especially with food crops, be sure to observe and follow all "withdrawal times" on the label before consuming any produce that was treated. Labels on pesticides are legal documents and contain all of the information you need to make safe choices.

Controlling flea beetles organically is also possible. Floating row covers can help, these are typically a light gauzy material that is draped over the crop using simple supports. This excludes the beetles as well as many other pests. (continued)

Flea Beetles (continued)

Deep mulch around crops can also help to break the larval cycle by making it more difficult for them to emerge from the soil. Sticky traps can also be effective. Another solution would be to plant a “trap crop” of something to be sacrificed to the beetles. Radishes usually work well. Plant these first to draw adult flea beetles to the trap crop before planting the main crop (broccoli, kale, etc.). Once beetles begin infesting the trap crop, they can be sprayed and more effectively controlled.

Good garden sanitation is the first step to controlling flea beetles, however if you do notice a large population of them quickly turning your garden into a personal buffet table, there are some options. Next time you notice Swiss chard that looks like Swiss cheese, be sure to blame the correct insect and control it properly. ~Anna Timmerman



Typical “Buckshot” damage from feeding flea beetles.



2017 PLANT SALES



NEW ORLEANS CITY PARK
**BOTANICAL
GARDEN**

The Pelican Greenhouse is located just off Henry Thomas (Golf) Drive, South of the I-610 overpass. Bring a wagon and arrive early.

JUNE 3

Pelican Greenhouse

9:00 a.m. - Noon

JULY 1

Pelican Greenhouse

9:00 a.m. - Noon

AUGUST 5

Pelican Greenhouse

9:00 a.m. - Noon

SEPTEMBER 9

Pelican Greenhouse

9:00 a.m. - Noon

OCTOBER 7-8

Fall Garden Festival

10:00 a.m. - 5:00 pm

For additional information, call 504/483-9464, visit our website at www.neworleanscitypark.com, or e-mail to plants@nocp.org

Plants are now available for sale in our new Garden Gift Shop

June Checklist/Garden Tips

Chinch bugs, which are most damaging during hot dry weather, often begin to show up in June. Look for irregular dead areas that enlarge fairly rapidly. The grass will have a dry, straw-like appearance. Treat with acephate, permethrin, cyfluthrin or other labeled insecticides to prevent extensive damage. Follow label directions carefully.

During dry weather don't forget to keep your compost pile evenly moist. Dry organic matter will not decompose. Do not, however, keep the pile saturated as that can cause bad odors.

Powdery mildew continues to be a problem on many ornamentals (crape myrtles, euonymus, roses) and vegetables (squash, cucumbers). Treat with chlorothalonil or other labeled fungicides.

You may fertilize Your lawn in June if desired.

Prune climbing roses and ramblers that bloom on one year old growth now if needed to shape and train them.

Apply paint or shade cloth to greenhouses to prevent heat buildup. Fans should run just about constantly.

Remove any flowers that appear on caladiums or coleus to promote continued production of colorful foliage.

Prepare trees for hurricane season by pruning out all weak, rotting or dead branches. Remove dead or rotten trees that might blow over in high winds.

Trim dead flowers from chrysanthemums that bloomed earlier if you have not done so already. Cut plants back about half way and fertilize to encourage vigorous growth. Pinch vigorous shoots over the next six weeks to create a bushier, fuller plant. Do not pinch or cut back after late July.

When a gladiolus finishes blooming, prune off the faded flower spike but leave the foliage intact. The foliage will produce food that is stored in the newly developing corm ensuring a large, healthy corm that will bloom well next year.

Dig and store gladiolus corms after the foliage turns brown. The largest corms are the ones that will flower next year.

Plant a row or two of peanuts in the home garden now as early summer crops are pulled up. Shell raw peanuts and plant about three to four seeds per foot of row. Water once a day until the seeds come up. Peanuts also make an excellent green manure crop. Just as the plants come into flower turn them under. They will enrich the soil with nitrogen and organic matter. Allow the bed to sit for a few weeks while the organic matter decomposes, and you will be ready to plant a fall crop.

Remove any flowers that appear on caladiums or coleus to promote continued production of colorful foliage.

Watch the rainfall you receive carefully, as it varies widely around the area. Cut back on irrigation whenever your garden receives one half inch or more of rain. Over watering is entirely possible if you are not careful, and that can lead to fungus problems such as stem, crown and root rot.

High temperatures and high humidity create a high heat index here in the summer. Adjust your gardening schedule to take advantage of cooler times of the day. Remember to drink plenty of water.

June Checklist/Garden Tips

Avoid using weed killers or herbicides on your lawn now. High temperatures increase the chance of discoloring or damaging the grass. Spot treat areas of weeds rather than the entire lawn.

Spray peach tree trunks with permethrin to prevent the peach tree borer from getting into the trunk and causing damage.

Cut back early summer flowering perennials in the garden when they finish flowering to keep the plants looking attractive and, in the case of some perennials, encourage more flowering.

Keep caladiums well watered during hot, dry weather to keep the foliage in good shape through the summer. Fertilize occasionally to encourage vigorous growth. Break off any flowers that form.

Despite the heat and dry weather, you can continue to plant colorful bedding plants to brighten summer flower beds. Keep newly planted bedding plants well watered during the first few weeks while they get established and be sure to mulch beds to conserve soil moisture. When the bed is first planted and the plants are still small, take the opportunity to run a soaker hose through the bed and cover it with mulch. It will make watering the bed much easier and efficient later on.

Ornamental grasses are an excellent choice for gardeners trying to introduce more drought tolerant pest resistant plants into their landscapes. There are many types suitable for virtually any landscape situation.

Plant palms during the summer through August as they establish best when planted into warm soil. Select hardier palms such as cabbage palm, windmill palm, Mediterranean fan palm, Canary Island date palm, palmetto and needle palm. Keep them well watered during their establishment period.

When parsley sends up its flower stalks, or bolts, its productive season is over. However, the tiny flowers provide food for and attract parasitic wasps to the garden. So consider leaving your blooming parsley in place until flowering is over before removing it.

Your Local Extension Office is Here to Help

E-mail us at: GNOGardening@agcenter.lsu.edu



Follow us on Facebook at [GNOGardening](https://www.facebook.com/GNOGardening)

For more information visit LSUAgCenter.com

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