

# Eggplant

It seems that all over the world, at some point along the way, many cultures met and fell in love with the lovely appearance and creamy-smooth flesh of this surprisingly versatile vegetable.

## STORAGE

Eggplant prefers to be kept at about 50° F, which is warmer than most refrigerators and cooler than most kitchen counters. Wrap unwashed eggplant in a towel (not in plastic) to absorb any moisture and keep it in the vegetable bin of your refrigerator. Used within a week, it should still be fresh and mild.

## HANDLING

Many people like to peel, salt, and drain their eggplant to draw out any bitter flavor; however, bitterness develops only in eggplant that has been stored for a while, so with farm-fresh specimens this is generally not necessary. Many recipes call for salting in order to make the vegetable less watery and more absorbent—much like draining tofu. Salting is not an essential step, but it can greatly enhance the taste and texture of your dish and is well worth the extra effort.

The shape of an eggplant determines how it is best prepared. Slice a straight, narrow eggplant into rounds for grilling or broiling, and cut a rounded, bulbous eggplant into cubes for stews and stir-fries.

## Broiled Eggplant with Crunchy Parmesan Crust

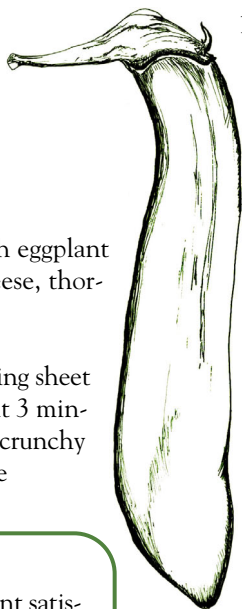
This is such an easy way to make a crunchy-crust ed eggplant appetizer that you may even feel guilty about the raves it receives. Recipe-tester Barbara suggests topping this dish with tomato sauce. *Angelic Organics Kitchen* (adapted from *Recipes from a Kitchen Garden*).

oil for greasing the baking sheet  
mayonnaise  
eggplant, cut into 1/4-inch slices  
freshly grated Parmesan cheese (about 1/2 cup)

1. Preheat the broiler. Lightly oil a baking sheet.
2. Spread mayonnaise sparingly on both sides of each eggplant slice, then dip the slices in the grated Parmesan cheese, thoroughly coating both sides.
3. Arrange the slices in a single layer on the oiled baking sheet and place under the broiler until golden brown, about 3 minutes. Flip the slices and broil until golden brown and crunchy on top and the eggplant is soft, about 3 minutes more

## Overheard

The intern said that seeing eggplants grow on a plant satisfied him more than anything else in the world. Like most of the students he's working with in the garden, he'd never seen those glossy purple fruits attached to their greenery.



## A Shareholder

I am a painter, and there is not a single eggplant that I haven't lusted over the color of, or a pepper I haven't looked at as a work of art.

## Baba Ghanouj

This is a traditional Middle Eastern recipe for baba ghanouj, a thick but light spread that is delicious as a dip for pita bread or vegetables or as a filling in a sandwich. Its distinct, nutty flavor comes from tahini, a sesame paste that is widely available in specialty stores and many supermarkets. *Angelic Organics Kitchen* (adapted from *Fields of Greens*).

Serves 4

- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, divided
- 2 medium eggplants (about 1 1/2 pounds)
- 1/4 cup pine nuts
- 1/4–1/2 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice (1–1 1/2 large lemons)
- 1/3 cup tahini
- 1–2 cloves garlic, minced (1/2–1 teaspoon)
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin (optional)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro or parsley



1. Preheat the oven to 375° F.
2. Rub 1 tablespoon of the oil over both whole eggplants and place them on a baking sheet. Roast, turning once or twice, until very soft, 30 to 45 minutes depending on size. Let cool.
3. Meanwhile, toast the pine nuts in a dry, heavy skillet (preferably cast iron) over high heat until they start to brown in spots and become fragrant. (Be careful not to overtoast them, as they will burn very quickly once toasted.) Immediately transfer the nuts to a dish to cool.
4. Cut the eggplants in half and scoop out the flesh. Purée the eggplant flesh in a food processor or finely chop it on a cutting board. Transfer to a bowl.
5. Add the lemon juice, tahini, garlic, cumin, salt, cayenne, and the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Mix until well combined.
6. Transfer to a serving bowl and garnish with cilantro or parsley and toasted pine nuts.

Excerpted from *Farmer John's Cookbook: The Real Dirt On Vegetables: Seasonal Recipes and Stories from a Community Supported Farm* by Farmer John Peterson & Angelic Organics (Gibbs Smith Publisher). Check with your local farm or bookstore for availability. Additional recipes, charts, individual copies of this book, and quantity discounts available at [www.AngelicOrganics.com/cookbook](http://www.AngelicOrganics.com/cookbook).

