UF IFAS Extension UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

HS1243

Conventional and Specialty Eggplant Varieties in Florida[1]

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Eggplants (*Solanum melongena* L.) are members of the nightshade family Solanaceae. Cultural practices employed in eggplant production are similar to other agronomic members of the Solanaceae family, such as tomatoes and peppers. Eggplants are warm-season plants that are more vulnerable to cold temperatures than tomatoes. For most of the nation, eggplants are best suited for production during warmer months. However, in south Florida, where winters are mild and freezes are infrequent, eggplants are planted from August to March (Andersen 2013). Eggplants grow best when started from transplants initially grown in protected structures, such as greenhouses, and they prefer well-drained, sandy, and loam soil with temperatures between 70˚F to 85˚F (Doubrava and Miller 2003). Although eggplants are considered vegetables, botanically they are a fruit because they derive from an ovary. Because of their cooking versatility and ability to absorb flavor, eggplants are used in many cultural dishes and cuisines. Even though eggplants are not a high source of any vitamin or mineral, they can add color and flavor to dishes with minimal calories (one cup of cooked eggplant is 38 calories). Most eggplant varieties are fairly similar except for the size and skin, and they can be used interchangeably in recipes.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has not collected complete domestic production statistics for eggplants since 2001 (Huntrods and Lore 2012). That year, US eggplant production was valued at $42.5 million, and Georgia, Florida, California, New Jersey, and New York were the top five producers. From winter 2007 to winter 2009, Florida's average national market share for eggplants was 24%. In 2007, Florida was ranked second in eggplant production with 76 farms harvesting 1,173 acres (USDA 2009). California statistics for 2009 indicate the state harvested more than 17,300 short tons of eggplants valued at $11.8 million. In 2011, California was the largest eggplant producer with 1,446 acres (Thornsbury 2013). The average yield of eggplant is 762 bushels per acre (bu./ac.) with an approximate price price of $14 per 1/9 bushel box (in 2017) (USDA ARS 2017). Eggplants are sold during an approximate 10-month period throughout the year—with 25% harvested in the winter (January–March), 40% harvested in the spring (April– mid-July), and 35% harvested in the fall (mid-September–December). South Florida is the main region for eggplant production in the state. The majority of the harvested acreage is in Palm Beach County, with significant production in Miami-Dade, Hendry, Collier, Manatee, Lee, and Hillsborough Counties. The remainder of eggplant production is distributed throughout the state (UF/IFAS Extension Hendry County director Gene McAvoy, personal communication).

1. This document is HS1243, one of a series of the Horticultural Sciences Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 2014. Revised October 2017. Visit the EDIS website at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu.

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Eggplant Varieties

Here is a guide to eggplant varieties commonly used in Florida (Table 1 and 2):

Table 1. Conventional, specialty, and heirloom eggplant varieties for Florida.

Type/Variety	Producer	Dealer	Season (Relative Maturity)	Characteristics of Plant and Fruit	Resistance	Comments
Typical American: Usually packed in a decaliter or a modified 1 1/9-bu. box and graded either "fancy" or "choice" with three sizes: giant (12–14 count), fancy (16–18 count), and small (20–24 count).						
Classic 	Harris Moran Seed Company	Clifton Seed Company, Harris Seeds, and Seedway	65 days	Plants are erect, vigorous, and tall. The upright plants support heavy yields of high-quality fruit, which becomes smaller as the plant matures. The oval fruit is elongated and glossy with a green calyx. The deep purple-black fruit has a fancy appearance and may turn a reddish color when mature.	R to ToM	Classic is the industry standard in dark-purple eggplants. The plants do not perform well in cooler weather.
Nadia 	Vilmorin Vegetable Seeds	Johnny's Selected Seeds, Osborne Seed Company, Reimer Seeds, Siegers Seed Co., and Stokes Seeds Inc.	70 days	Plants are strong, tall, and vigorous. Plants produce high yields of oval, long, and very firm fruit. The attractive, purple-black fruit has a long harvest period.	R to ToM	Good fruit sets under cool conditions. The fruit has an excellent shelf life.
Night Shadow 	Seminis	Osborne Seed Company, Siegers Seed Co., and Stokes Seeds Inc.	75 days	Plants are strong and widely adapted with a high-yield potential. Plants produce firm, elongated, and oval fruit that maintains a rich, glossy, and black color through harvest.	R to BES, TM, ToM	Plants have reduced blossom-end scar. Plants are suitable for freezing.
Santana 	Syngenta	Chile Plants. com, Clifton Seed Company, and Siegers Seed Co.	80 days	Plants are tall, vigorous, and upright with few spines. Fruit has a firm, glossy, and black-purple exterior. The fruit has a white flesh with an attractive, bright-green calyx.	None	Plants continuously set. Early fruit is smaller (22–24 count).

Type/Variety	Producer	Dealer	Season (Relative Maturity)	Characteristics of Plant and Fruit	Resistance	Comments
Traviata 	Enza Zaden	Harris Seeds, High Mowing Organic Seeds, Johnny's Selected Seeds, Osborne Seed Company, The Natural Gardening Company, and West Coast Seeds	68 days	Plants are well balanced and produce fruit that is strong growing, high quality, and firm. Fruit look smaller (22–24 count) but are very uniform in size. Fruit has a very attractive, shiny, and purple color.	None	Plants are recommended for spring and summer protected crop and open field cultivation. Plants are continuous and have a very high overall production. Organic seed available. USDA—OGANIC
Sicilian: Usually packed in a decaliter box or a modified 1 1/9-bu. box.						
Birgah 	Seminis	Stokes Seeds Inc.	65 days	Plants have round, heavy, and firm fruit. Fruit has a deep-purple color and white flesh.	R to ToM	Fruit has a sweet taste.
Italian Pink Bicolor	Fratelli	Stokes Seeds Inc.	75 days	Plants have oval fruit with a creamy rose color that matures to a rose-pink color with a purple calyx.	None	Plants are open pollinated and suitable for freezing.
White: Usually packed in a half bu. box.						
Ghostbuster 	Harris Moran Seed Company	Clifton Seed Company, Harris Seeds, and Seedway	72 days	Plants are broad and semi-upright. Plants produce white, oval-shaped fruit that is 6 to 7-inches long.	None	Fruit is sweeter and tastier than dark-skinned varieties. Fruit is best harvested early before it starts to turn yellow.
Italian: Usually packed in a half bu. Box						
Megal 	Vilmorin Vegetable Seeds	Chile Plants. com, Osborne Seed Company, Siegers Seed Co., Stokes Seeds Inc., and Reimer Seeds	62 days	Plants have Italian, cylindrical fruit with a purple-black color. Fruit is very uniform with only a few spines.	R to CM and TM, ToM	Fruit has an excellent shelf life and flavor. Plants are recommended for local markets and specialty growers.

Type/Variety	Producer	Dealer	Season (Relative Maturity)	Characteristics of Plant and Fruit	Resistance	Comments
Vittoria 	Not available	Chile Plants. com, OSC Seeds, Reimer Seeds, Seeds of Change, and Sweet Corn Organic Nursery	61 days	Plants have very long cylindrical and deep-purple fruit with a green calyx.	R to TM	Fruit has a mild flavor. Organic seed available. USDA—OGANIC
Japanese: Usually packed in a half bu. box.						
Millionaire 	Not available	Burpee, Evergreen Seeds, Jung, Kitazawa Seed Co., Osborne Seed Company, Reimer Seeds, Stokes Seeds Inc., and Territorial Seed Company	55 days	Plants have slender, oriental-type fruit that is dark purple. The fruit also has a purple calyx, soft skin, and tender flesh.	None	Plants are good for greenhouses, open fields, and home gardens.
Spanish or Dominican: Usually packed in a decaliter box or a modified 1 1/9-bu. box.						
Zebra 	Not available	Reimer Seeds and Morningsun Herb Farm	65 days	Plants have elongated and oval-shaped fruit. Fruit is variegated with purple and white stripes and grows about 8 inches long by 4 inches wide.	None	Fruit is very attractive and has a good flavor.

Table 2. Disease key to abbreviations.

BES	Blossom end scar
CM	Cucumber mosaic virus
TM	Tobacco mosaic virus
ToM	Tomato mosaic virus
R	Resistant

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