



# Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

August 14, 2014

## Vegetable Feature: Eggplant

by Sarah Janes Ugoretz

It's that time of year already—eggplant season! A member of the Solanaceae or nightshade family, eggplant is indigenous to a vast region that includes northeast India, Burma, northern Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and southwest China. It is believed to have grown wild over this spread of land for the last 1500 years. As trade routes flourished, the eggplant made its way to Africa via Persian merchants by the 8th century and Europe by way of the Arabs by the 13th century. By the 1800s, Spanish explorers had introduced the eggplant to New World gardens. Being a member of the nightshade family, eggplants (along with tomatoes) were initially believed to be poisonous. Tales of the “mad apple” and the insanity that followed shortly after consumption ran rampant throughout Italy, while there was a general belief that eggplant caused leprosy, elephantiasis, thickening and blackening of the blood, or at the very least, an ill and bitter nature. English herbalist Gerarde, in 1597, warned: “for doubtlesse these apples have a mischeevous quality, the use thereof is utterly to be forsaken...Therefore is it better to esteeme this plant and have him in the garden for your pleasure and the rarenesse thereof, then for any virtue or good qualities yet knowne.” Unsurprisingly, the eggplant's early uses remained primarily ornamental.

As eggplant made its transition from culinary aversion to culinary gem, varieties were developed that were significantly less bitter than their predecessors—some of which were too bitter to be palatable. We have chosen to grow varieties that we find to be very palatable and do not find them to be bitter. Bitterness in eggplant tends to be attributed to older eggplants that have been kept in cold storage and transported over long distances. If you ever find yourself with one of these, the bitterness can be mostly resolved by halving your eggplant, salting each half and letting the salt draw out the bitterness. This process can last from 30 minutes up to several hours, just be sure to blot the flesh of the eggplant before you begin cooking. If you cook the eggplant in your boxes within a few days after you receive it, you should not detect any bitterness and can likely skip over the salting step.

To grow eggplant invites certain challenges, most notably in the forms of the flea beetle and the Colorado Potato Beetle, both of which count eggplant among their favorite food sources. To combat this, we plant eggplant in double rows on reflective (think silver) mulch, which does a relatively decent job of deterring these insects. Farmer Richard says that by doing this, “We see the true beauty of the healthy eggplants without insect holes in the leaves.” The flowering plant features beautiful combinations of violet and yellow blossoms, and the Asian varieties of eggplant—which Harmony Valley Farm favors—boast firm white flesh that holds its firmness both after picking and cooking. Among our most dense varieties

## This Weeks' Box

**SWEET SPANISH ONIONS:** Thinly sliced sweet onions are a nice addition to summer vegetable salads such as the Eggplant and Tomato Salad in this week's newsletter.

**SUMMER SQUASH:** Cut into slices, brush lightly with oil and season with salt and pepper. Grill just until tender, then use as a pizza topping.

**SILVER SLICERS OR GREEN CUCUMBERS:** Slice thinly and marinate along with minced ginger & garlic in rice wine vinegar, a splash of soy sauce and sesame oil. Use as a condiment to serve with grilled or seared tuna or salmon.

**RED CURLY KALE:** You can make pesto out of nearly anything...including kale! Make a batch of kale pesto and toss it with pasta or grilled vegetables.

**ASSORTED MELONS:** In your box this week, you'll receive one of the following: Sun Jewel or Sweet Sarah Cantaloupe or French Orange Melon or Canary Melon. Refer to last week's blog post or newsletter to help you identify your melon.

**RED SEEDLESS OR YELLOW SEEDED WATERMELON:** Check out the recipe in this week's newsletter for a refreshing watermelon-grapefruit agua fresca beverage.

**GREEN BELL PEPPERS:** Slice and saute or grill along with sweet onions to top off a Philly cheese steak sandwich!

**JALAPEÑOS:** Please note this is a hot pepper...not one of our mini sweet peppers. They are small, firm and dark green. Use them to add a little heat to a fresh pico de gallo.

**EDAMAME:** These are fresh soybeans and are best when cooked. Boil the edamame in their pods for 3-5 minutes in heavily salted water. Remove the edamame from the water and run them under cold water. Squeeze the pods to pop the beans out of the pod. Eat the bean and discard the pod...it is not edible.

**GREEN BEANS:** Snap into bite-sized pieces and include in a summer vegetable succotash along with corn, onions, peppers, garlic and tomatoes.

**ASSORTED TOMATOES:** It's best to store tomatoes on the kitchen counter instead of in the refrigerator. Cold storage will make them flavorless and mealy.

**SWEET CORN:** The key to “sweet” corn is to keep it cold and eat it soon after you receive it. The longer you store it the starchier it will become. Enjoy it on the cob, or trim it off the cob and add it into a delicious corn & tomato salad.

**EGGPLANT:** Read more about this colorful vegetable in this week's newsletter and take a look at the featured recipes.

**BONUS ITEM:** Broccoli or Cauliflower or Sungold/Grape Tomatoes

you'll find the Listada and Dancer varieties. Listada is an Italian heirloom variety that can be used for grilling, roasting, or stewing. Purple Dancer is one of our favorite varieties because it produces very well, has a creamy white flavorful flesh, and is an “all-purpose” type of eggplant. We're also trialing a new heirloom variety this season called Kamo—a Japanese gourmet variety with a dense flesh and an incredibly rich taste. Our Lilac Bride eggplant is perfect for slicing and including in a stir-fry, while our Green Thai variety is delicious in a milky Thai curry dish. Of course there is also the traditional Black Globe eggplant that shines in traditional recipes such as baba ganoush, eggplant Parmesan and moussaka.

When it comes to storing your eggplant, keep in mind that they are tropical plants that don't favor the cold. You can keep them on your counter for a day or two, but they'll quickly lose their moisture, which will lead to a less enjoyable eating experience. It's best to use them within the first few days of receiving them. If you'd like to keep them around for a few days, wrap them well in a cloth or newspaper and keep them in the refrigerator. Oh, and look out for thorns, as some eggplant varieties have their own built in deterrents on the calyx.

Nutritionally, eggplant contains fiber, potassium, manganese, copper, vitamins

B1 and B6, folate, magnesium, and niacin. Eggplants also contain phytonutrients, which are useful for fighting free radicals—basically, these nutrients keep you healthy by protecting you from germs, fungi, bugs and other threats. By itself, eggplant is extremely low in calories. Its flesh, however, is exceptionally good at soaking up anything you might pair it with—cream, olive oil, any type of sauce or seasoning. One of my favorite dishes which really demonstrates this unique feature of eggplant is Stuffed Eggplant with Lamb and Pine Nuts by Yotam Ottolenghi and Sami Tamimi. The recipe can be found in their cookbook *Jerusalem: A Cookbook*, or search for a variation on [www.seriousseats.com](http://www.seriousseats.com). The combination of lamb and eggplant seasoned with cumin, sweet paprika and cinnamon is perfect for a cooler summer evening.

Because eggplant has spread to many parts of the world, you'll find it to be a part of many different cultures including Indian, Italian, Chinese & Japanese to name a few. Eggplant can be grilled, broiled, roasted, steamed, stir-fried or stewed. Recipes often instruct you to peel the eggplant. This step often can be eliminated if you are eating a fresh eggplant. It is best to eat it fully cooked, and you can tell an eggplant is cooked by the softness of the flesh. The flesh should become very soft, tender & silky. If it is still sponge-like, it needs

to be cooked longer.

Although you can find common varieties of eggplant in the grocery store year-round, the true season for us in this part of the world is short, which means time is fleeting. Refer to this week's "What's In the Box" email or our blog for pictures that will help you identify the variety you receive in your box. After you've taken a few minutes to admire the beauty and the nutritional value of your eggplants, dive in and try a few new recipes!

**Sources:** <https://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/chronicaeggplant.pdf>;  
<http://ag.arizona.edu/maricopa/garden/html/pubs/0203/eggplant.html>

## Eggplant "Meatballs" in Tomato Sauce

Recipe adapted from Domenica Marchetti's book, *The Glorious Vegetables of Italy*.

### Yield: 4 to 5 servings

1 pound eggplant (1 large or 2 to 3 medium to small)  
1½ to 2 cups dried bread crumbs  
2 large eggs  
2 garlic cloves, minced  
½ tsp fine sea salt  
2 oz Pecorino Romano cheese, freshly grated (may substitute any other hard, aged cheese)  
1 Tbsp minced fresh basil  
1 Tbsp minced fresh flat-leaf parsley  
Unbleached all-purpose flour for dredging  
Vegetable oil for roasting & frying  
3 cups fresh tomato sauce, heated to a simmer in a saucepan big enough to hold all the meatballs  
Freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano or Pecorino Romano cheese for serving

**\*\*NOTE:** These can also be formed into a patty to make a tasty vegetarian burger that can be eaten as a sandwich with thin slices of onion, tomatoes and a balsamic mayonnaise spread.

1. Heat the oven to 350°F.
2. Cut the eggplant(s) in half. Lightly coat all sides of the eggplant halves with vegetable oil. Place eggplant halves cut side down in a baking dish. Bake for about 1 hour, or until the skin is crinkled and collapsed and the interior is completely tender. Remove from the oven and let set briefly to cool. Once cool enough to handle, scoop the flesh onto a cutting board and discard the skin. Coarsely chop the flesh with a Chef's knife. You should have just over one cup of eggplant.
3. Put the eggplant flesh into a large bowl and add 1½ cup bread crumbs, eggs, garlic, salt, cheese, basil and parsley. Fold everything together gently but thoroughly with a wooden spoon or spatula. If the mixture seems too wet and doesn't hold together well, mix in a few more bread crumbs.
4. Spoon about 1 cup of flour into a shallow bowl. Have ready a platter lined with paper towels, waxed paper or a baking rack. Using your hands, form the eggplant mixture into golf ball-size balls. Dredge the balls in the flour and place them on the prepared platter. Press down on them gently to flatten them just a bit. You should end up with about fifteen 2-inch eggplant meatballs.
5. Pour enough vegetable oil into a deep frying pan or cast-iron skillet to reach a depth of at least ¼ to ½ inch. Place over medium-high heat and heat the oil just until it shimmers and a tiny ball of the eggplant mixture sizzles gently when you place it in the oil.
6. Working in two batches, add the eggplant meatballs to the hot oil and fry until golden-brown on the bottom, 2 to 3 minutes. Turn with a spatula and fry the other side until golden-brown, 2 minutes more. Continue to rotate the balls every couple minutes until they are nicely browned.
7. Transfer the eggplant meatballs from the frying pan onto a rack placed in a baking dish. Bake the "meatballs" for 10-15 minutes at 350°F. Remove them from the oven and either serve immediately with fresh tomato sauce and cheese to garnish, or freeze them. When you are ready to reheat them, take them directly from the freezer and place them on a cookie sheet. Reheat in the oven until they are fully warmed.

## Indian Eggplant and Onion Dip with Pita Chips

Recipe featured in *Bon Appetit* magazine, December 2010.

### Serves 6

- 2 pita rounds, cut horizontally in half, then cut into wedges  
2 Tbsp olive oil, divided  
1 pound eggplant  
¼ cup chopped onions  
1-2 unpeeled garlic cloves  
½ tsp red wine vinegar  
1 Tbsp chopped fresh mint  
1 Tbsp chopped fresh cilantro  
¼ tsp garam masala
1. Preheat oven to 475°F. Arrange pita wedges in single layer on rimmed baking sheet; brush pita lightly with olive oil. Bake until crisp, about 4 minutes.
  2. Cut eggplant in half. Brush all sides of the eggplant with 2 Tbsp oil and place halves, cut side down on a baking sheet. Drizzle onions and garlic with 1 Tbsp oil and toss to coat evenly. Place onions and garlic on other half of sheet.
  3. Roast vegetables until browned and tender, about 30 minutes. Peel garlic. Scoop out pulp from eggplant and transfer to food processor along with the onions, peeled garlic and red wine vinegar. Puree until almost smooth. Transfer puree to bowl; mix in mint, cilantro and garam masala. Season with salt and pepper; serve with pita chips.

## Eggplant & Tomato Salad with Walnuts

Recipe originally featured in *Food and Wine* magazine, June 2011.

### Serves 4

- 1 pound eggplant, sliced lengthwise into ½ inch thick slices  
Jalapeño, quantity to your liking  
Vegetable oil, for brushing  
Salt, to taste  
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste  
2 Tbsp chopped cilantro  
2 Tbsp red wine vinegar  
1 garlic clove, minced  
2 to 3 medium tomatoes, cut into ½-inch dice  
1 small sweet onion or red onion, thinly sliced into rings  
1 Tbsp chopped walnuts or 1 Tbsp walnut oil  
Grilled flatbread or pita bread, for serving
1. Preheat grill. Brush the eggplant slices and the jalapeño all over with oil and season with salt. Grill the eggplant over moderate heat until nicely charred and tender, about 4 minutes per side. Transfer the eggplant to a work surface and let cool. Grill the jalapeño, turning until charred and almost tender, about 4 minutes. Peel and seed the jalapeño, then finely chop it. Start by adding about ⅓ to ½ of the jalapeño to the salad. You can always add more if you like. Cut the eggplant into ½-inch dice.
  2. In a large bowl, combine the cilantro, vinegar and garlic. Add the eggplant, jalapeño, tomatoes and onion. Season with salt and pepper and toss to combine. Garnish with the walnuts or walnut oil and serve at room temperature with grilled flatbread.

## SAVE THE DATE!

HARVEST PARTY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2014

Watch for more details in newsletters and email.

*Note: The salad can stand at room temperature for up to 1 hour in advance to allow the flavors to come together. This salad makes a delicious summer accompaniment for grilled steak or chicken. It can also be put in a pita bread pocket and topped off with feta for a quick lunch.*