

Eating Local & Seasonal: Eggplant

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Eggplants are probably one of the most underrated vegetables that grow right here in Ontario. In this issue of Minute Nutrition News, learn more about the eggplant and get inspired by North African, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cuisines on how to use this delicious vegetable!



Buying Eggplant

Eggplants come in several varieties that can be distinguished by their shape - long, round or bell-shaped. The taste and texture is similar across the varieties so start by trying what you can find locally! When buying this vegetable, look for ones that are plump and firm.

Preparing Zucchini for Eating

Wash the eggplant under cold running water. Depending on the recipe, you may or may not trim off the end with the stem. It cannot be eaten but is sometimes kept on for presentation. The skin can be eaten but is peeled off in some recipes. Cut zucchini right before using to prevent browning and discolouration.

Recipes to Try with Eggplant

Eggplant is a common ingredient used in North African, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cuisines. Get inspired by looking up these popular eggplant dishes below.

- Baba ghanoush is a Levantine dish of cooked eggplant with tahini and other seasonings. Typically served as a starter or a side dish as a dip for pita bread.
- Zaalouk is a Moroccan dish of cooked eggplants and tomatoes, seasoned with spices. Makes a great dip. Check out the featured recipe on the next page.
- Eggplant Parmigiana is a well-known Italian dish of sliced eggplant, baked with cheese and tomato sauce.
- Ratatouille is a French stewed vegetable dish of eggplant, tomatoes, zucchini, and peppers flavoured with herbs.
- Tepsi Baytinijan is Iraq's comfort food. The name translates to eggplant casserole where sliced eggplants are accompanied by meatballs, and other vegetables.
- Many countries have their own version of stuffed eggplants. Many are stuffed with meat, other vegetables, and sometimes rice and cheese.



Moroccan Eggplant Dip (Zaalouk)

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

Ingredients:

1 large eggplant, peeled, coarsely chopped
4 large tomatoes, peeled, seeded, chopped*
3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1/4 cup coarsely chopped fresh cilantro
1/4 cup coarsely chopped fresh parsley
1 tbsp paprika
1/2 tbsp cumin
1/2 tsp salt
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
1/3 cup water
1/8 tsp cayenne pepper, optional
1 lemon wedge, optional

Directions:

1. Combine all ingredients (except lemon wedge) in a large deep skillet or pot. Cover and simmer over medium to medium high heat for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally.
2. With a spoon or potato masher, crush and blend tomatoes and eggplant to consistency of your liking.
3. Add lemon wedge to the pot, if using. Continue simmering the mixture, uncovered for 10 minutes.
4. The dip is ready when liquids are reduced and mixture can be stirred into a heap in the centre of the pan.
5. Drizzle olive oil (or chili oil if you like spicy food). Serve with bread or as a side dish with meals.

**Cooking Tip:*

To peel and seed tomatoes, make X shaped cuts on the bottom of each tomato. Place in boiling water for 15-30 seconds. Remove and place in ice water bath to cool. Once cooled, peel the tomato skin starting at the X and cut out the stem with a knife. To seed the tomatoes, cut the tomatoes in half crosswise and use a small measuring spoon to scoop out the seeds.

Sources:

(1) Photo on page 1 by Mark Stebnicki: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/top-view-photo-of-vegetables-2694393/>

(2) Recipe by Christine Benlafquih from The Spruce Eats. Retrieved from <https://www.thespruceeats.com/moroccan-zaalouk-eggplant-and-tomato-salad-2394866>