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Eggplant

Solanum melonga

Crazy - eggs growing on bushes

Worth Knowing: The eggplant has many lovers among the gourmets in its natural habitat as well as in Europe. With early propagation it grows about 50 cm tall and shows, starting from July, its beautiful purple blossoms. Between August and October, the plant produces its fruits that look somewhat like chicken eggs in the beginning and getting its dark purple colour of a ripe eggplant later on. In the kitchen: The fruits are harvested unripe and dark purple coloured and should not be eaten raw. However, they can be fried, baked or cooked and are especially suited for soups and curries. In the Mediterranean kitchen, the eggplant fruit is part of many famous dishes, like the French Ratatouille, the Italian Parmigiana di melanzane or the Greek Mousaka.

Natural Location: Originally the *Solanum melongena* comes from India and Bangladesh.

Cultivation: Outdoors, you can start planting the seeds from the middle of May, but with seedlings raised from middle of March on your windowsill, you will get a better result. Spread the seeds on moist potting compost, put just a little compost earth on top and cover the seed container with clear film to prevent the earth from drying out. Don't forget to make some holes in the clear film and take it every second or third day completely off for about 2 hours. That way you avoid mold formation on your potting compost. Place the seed container somewhere bright and warm between 20°C and 25°C and keep the earth moist, but not wet. The germination takes about two to three weeks, and after another month, the seedlings can be shifted to a bigger pot or planted in the garden.

Place: To grow strong and produce a rich harvest, the Eggplant needs a sunny and warm place. During the summer, a wind-protected spot outdoors near a heat preserving wall would be ideal. In shaded and darker places, the plant cannot flourish and produce fruits.

Care: During growth and blossoming the Eggplant needs plenty of water. Limp hanging leaves are unmistakably indicate a lack of water. The flowers are self-pollinating, so it makes sense to sometimes shake the plant a little bit when there are no small insects around that carry the pollen from one flower to another. Between May and October it is recommended to give fluid fertilizer for tub plants every two weeks.

During the winter: Usually, the Eggplant is annual and doesn't need to hibernate. The seeds of the fruits can be used for next year's plants. Under perfect conditions however (warmth and light), the Eggplant hibernates and can last for several years.