

## Item of the Week: EGGPLANT



Eggplant, or aubergine as it is called in France, is a vegetable long prized for its beauty as well as its unique taste and texture. Eggplants belong to the plant family of Solanaceae, also commonly known as nightshades, and are kin to the tomato, bell pepper and potato. Eggplants grow in a manner much like tomatoes, hanging from the vines of a plant that grows several feet in height.

One of the most popular varieties of eggplant in North America looks like a pear-shaped egg, a characteristic from which its name is derived. The skin is glossy and

deep purple in color, while the flesh is cream colored and spongy in consistency. Contained within the flesh are seeds arranged in a conical pattern.

In addition to this variety, eggplant is also available in a cornucopia of other colors including lavender, jade green, orange, and yellow-white, as well as in sizes and shapes that range from that of a small tomato to a large zucchini.

While the different varieties do vary slightly in taste and texture, one can generally describe the eggplant as having a pleasantly bitter taste and spongy texture. In many recipes, eggplant fulfills the role of being a complementary ingredient that balances the surrounding flavors of the other more pronounced ingredients.

### Health Benefits

In addition to featuring a host of vitamins and minerals, eggplant also contains important phytonutrients, many which have antioxidant activity. Phytonutrients contained in eggplant include phenolic compounds, such as caffeic and chlorogenic acid, and flavonoids, such as nasunin.

#### Eggplant as Brain Food

Research on eggplant has focused on an anthocyanin phytonutrient found in eggplant skin called nasunin. Nasunin is a potent antioxidant and free radical scavenger that has been shown to protect cell membranes from damage. In animal studies, nasunin has been found to protect the lipids (fats) in brain cell membranes. Cell membranes are almost entirely composed of lipids and are responsible for protecting the cell from free radicals, letting nutrients in and wastes out, and receiving instructions from messenger molecules that tell the cell which activities it should perform.

#### Eggplant is Rich in Phenolic Antioxidant Compounds

Researchers at the US Agricultural Service in Beltsville, Maryland, have found that eggplants are rich sources of phenolic compounds that function as antioxidants. Plants form such compounds to protect themselves against oxidative stress from exposure to the elements, as well as from infection by bacteria and fungi.

The good news concerning eggplant is that the predominant phenolic compound found in all varieties tested is chlorogenic acid, which is one of the most potent free radical scavengers found in plant tissues. Benefits attributed to chlorogenic acid include antimutagenic (anti-cancer), antimicrobial, anti-LDL (bad cholesterol) and antiviral activities.

### **Cardiovascular Health and Free Radical Protection Provided by Eggplant**

When laboratory animals with high cholesterol were given eggplant juice, their blood cholesterol, the cholesterol in their artery walls and the cholesterol in their aortas (the aorta is the artery that returns blood from the heart back into circulation into the body) was significantly reduced, while the walls of their blood vessels relaxed, improving blood flow. These positive effects were likely due not only to nasunin but also to several other terpene phytonutrients in eggplant.

Nasunin is not only a potent free-radical scavenger, but is also an iron chelator. Although iron is an essential nutrient and is necessary for oxygen transport, normal immune function and collagen synthesis, too much iron is not a good thing. Excess iron increases free radical production and is associated with an increased risk of heart disease and cancer. Menstruating women, who lose iron every month in their menstrual flow, are unlikely to be at risk, but in postmenopausal women and men, iron, which is not easily excreted, can accumulate. By chelating iron, nasunin lessens free radical formation with numerous beneficial results, including protecting blood cholesterol (which is also a type of lipid or fat) from peroxidation; preventing cellular damage that can promote cancer; and lessening free radical damage in joints, which is a primary factor in rheumatoid arthritis.

### **How to Select and Store**

Choose eggplants that are firm and heavy for their size. Their skin should be smooth and shiny, and their color, whether it be purple, white or green, should be vivid. They should be free of discoloration, scars, and bruises, which usually indicate that the flesh beneath has become damaged and possibly decayed.

The stem and cap, on either end of the eggplant, should be bright green in color. As you would with other fruits and vegetables, avoid purchasing eggplant that has been waxed. To test for the ripeness of an eggplant, gently press the skin with the pad of your thumb. If it springs back, the eggplant is ripe, while if an indentation remains, it is not.

Although they look hardy, eggplants are actually very perishable and care should be taken in their storage. Eggplants are sensitive to both heat and cold and should ideally be stored at around 50 degrees Fahrenheit (10 degrees Celsius). Do not cut eggplant before you store it as it perishes quickly once its skin has been punctured or its inner flesh exposed.

Place uncut and unwashed eggplant in a plastic bag and store in the refrigerator crisper where it will keep for a few days. If it is too large for the crisper, do not try to force it in; this will damage the skin and cause the eggplant to spoil and decay. Instead, place it on a shelf within the refrigerator.

Here is some background on why we recommend refrigerating eggplant. Whenever food is stored, four basic factors affect its nutrient composition: exposure to air, exposure to light, exposure to heat, and length of time in storage. Vitamin C, vitamin B6, and carotenoids are good examples of nutrients highly susceptible to heat, and for this reason, their loss from food is very likely to be slowed down through refrigeration.

If you purchase eggplant that is wrapped in plastic film, remove it as soon as possible since it will inhibit the eggplant from breathing and degrade its freshness.

## Recipe (Source: Allrecipes.com)

### EGGPLANT PARMESAN

#### Ingredients:

3 eggplant, peeled and thinly sliced      2 eggs, beaten  
4 cups Italian seasoned bread crumbs      1/2 teaspoon dried basil  
6 cups spaghetti sauce, divided  
1 (16 ounce) package mozzarella cheese, shredded and divided



#### Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C).
2. Dip eggplant slices in egg, then in bread crumbs. Place in a single layer on a baking sheet. Bake in preheated oven for 5 minutes on each side.
3. In a 9x13 inch baking dish spread spaghetti sauce to cover the bottom. Place a layer of eggplant slices in the sauce. Sprinkle with mozzarella and Parmesan cheeses. Repeat with remaining ingredients, ending with the cheeses. Sprinkle basil on top.
4. Bake in preheated oven for 35 minutes, or until golden brown.

### EASY FRIED EGGPLANT

#### Ingredients:

2 tablespoons canola oil  
1 large eggplant, peeled and sliced  
3 eggs, beaten  
2 cups dry bread crumbs

#### Directions:

1. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Dip eggplant slices in egg, then in crumbs, and place in hot oil. Fry 2 to 3 minutes on each side, or until golden brown. Drain on paper towels.



Crosset Company's Annual Produce and Floral Conference will be held on  
**Wednesday, August 22, 2018**

## Organic Produce

**BEETS:** Beets still remain a challenge due to curly top virus that impacts the plant leaves and bulb. Supplies will be limited for a few more weeks until growers move to lower elevation new fields that should be clean.

**BROCCOLI:** Supplies have leveled off on broccoli and has become stable. Some pricing has come down a little but still remains relatively high.

**BUNCH CARROTS:** Supply has rebounded quite well and we are seeing much better quality.

**CABBAGE:** Supply has been stable and the warmer temperatures in Florida have increased supply.

**CAULIFLOWER:** Supplies are starting to stabilize as new fields have come online for growing. Cost has remained high, but showing good quality.

**CELERY:** Supply will remain steady for the next couple weeks as we move from the Yuma growing region up to Salinas. Quality will remain stable.

**CUCUMBERS:** Supply is starting stable in the market but we are going to see a little dip in supply as Mexico is seeing colder temps. We should remain in stock, but cost could increase.

**GREEN PEPPERS:** Steady supplies are available between Florida and growers out west.

**KALES:** Great supplies of kale currently, plenty of regional product from all over the Midwest available. We are sourcing from Georgia, Florida and other regions. Product is in great supply and pricing is very promotable.

**LETTUCES:** Inbound quality on leafs have suffered due to the growing transition out west. Lady Moon has had great supply in Florida with great quality!

**RADISHES:** Supplies are impacted by weather out west as rains and the growing transition has affected the tops. We have moved to using product out of Florida to remain in good shape as the quality is far superior.

**YELLOW SQUASH & ZUCCHINI:** Like cucumbers, temps have really affected supply in the Nogales growing region. We will see very limited supply on organic yellow squash.

## Western Vegetables

**ARTICHOKES:** Volume is very good on artichokes. Now is a great time to promote; all sizes are available. Product is coming out of the Mexican region and we also have domestic artichokes available. Domestic product is frost kissed and some peeling is present as well due to cold temperatures in the growing region. Frost kissed chokes, although appearance wise may not be favorable, have proven to be very good tasting.

**AVOCADOS:** All sizes available on conventional and organic. Organic large fruit is stable but pricing is high.

**BROCCOLI:** There has been a wide range in quality and pricing throughout the industry. There are multiple regions going on which is causing bigger numbers on broccoli/crowns in the industry than we have seen the past few weeks. We will have good volume for the next two weeks and then we will see a big drop in volume and product will be tight for us as we will be relying only on the Salinas production. Rains this week in the Salinas region could affect harvest schedule this week and any plantings that are going in as well.

**CAULIFLOWER:** With product pulling ahead the entire Yuma season, the harvest is set to end around 3/28. Salinas has been up and running for a few weeks, however with cooler temperatures and rain, numbers remain light and will continue to be light for the next few weeks. Quality remains good.

**CELERY:** The celery market has gained a little momentum as many shippers are finishing their Yuma/Mexican harvest. The Oxnard region has very good quality, however the region is expecting a major rain event this week. The region underwent fires in the last few months, which combined with the coming rain, could result in mudslides.

**ICEBERG LETTUCE:** The lettuce market remains strong. However, the product has gone through extreme elements with heat, frost and now rain. With impending rain, we expect that we will be rained out and will see shortages out of the region as the week progresses. The market should remain strong as Yuma finishes as many shippers do not transition through Huron and come straight to Salinas. Weather issues are expected in Salinas this week and into next which will effect production and quality.

**ROMAINE/ROMAINE HEARTS/MIXED LEAF:** The market has remained active on romaine hearts, romaine and green leaf, while red leaf and butter lettuce still have ample supplies. Product has endured heat, freezing temperatures and rain. Product has shown signs of blister and peel, predominantly in romaine and romaine hearts. The Huron region is experiencing heavy rains this week and harvest schedules could be effected.

## Value-Added

Spring transition of growing areas in the western U.S. is now taking place as growers and processors move from the desert back to Salinas, California for the spring/summer season. In addition to transition, there has been some heavy rain in California which has slowed down crop growth and harvesting. Expect some temporary supply gaps of various value-added items due to these issues.

## Southern Vegetables

**BEANS:** Market is down slightly.

**CABBAGE:** Good supplies out of the south.

**CORN:** Supplies will be increasing; prices are set pretty much through May on the spring corn promo.

**CUCUMBERS:** Market pretty much the same.

**EGGPLANT:** Dropped off a little.

**GREENS:** Good supplies on all greens coming out of the south.

**HARD SQUASH:** Good supplies on all hard squash.

**ONIONS:** The new crop Vidalia onions will begin April 15<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> with organics starting around May 1<sup>st</sup>.

**PEPPERS:** Mostly coming from Mexico, some from Florida. Market pretty much remains the same.

**POTATOES:** Markets are mostly steady. Idaho russet supplies remain good.

**YELLOW & ZUCCHINI SQUASH:** Dropped off a little.

## Asparagus

Mexican volume will continue to be light as Northern Mexico season wraps up and cooler weather continues to keep production light, but improved quality. With Easter pass, demand will flatten and some price drops will happen. Peru volume will continue to increase to replace the dwindling Mexican product particularly on eastern USA shipping. Organic supplies are steady and markets have dropped off.

## Fruits

**APPLES & PEARS:** All varieties of bagged Michigan apples are arriving with great quality and volume will remain strong through April. Bagged organic Washington apples are promotable and arriving with great quality. The first delivery of imported organic galas will arrive toward the end of this week and will be an excellent item to promote.

**BLACKBERRIES:** Blackberry production slowly causing markets to move up slightly as the wait to cycle into new production areas in Mexico sometime in late March/early April. Organic blackberry supply steady and markets remain a good value. Driscoll down slightly on California blackberries.

**BLUEBERRIES:** Chilean blueberries wrapping up for season but influx of last ships coming into ports from Chile has markets remaining low to move through the product before Florida volume increase. Quality is average. Look for full transition into Florida for week of 4/9 for best quality product. Organic deals still being offered and quality has been solid, but look for rapid change in conditions and supply in next week to 10 days. Florida is very limited and not a large producer for organics.

**CANTALOUPE & HONEYDEW:** Good volume continues on imported cantaloupes and markets remain stable. Market and supply should continue to be consistent over next few weeks. Honeydews are rebounding after a few weeks of tight supplies.

**CITRUS:** Navel oranges will run through May, possibly into June. Mineola's and Cara Cara navels and blood oranges will run through March.

**CLEMENTINES:** Market unchanged as product flow remains steady out of Morocco. 3# bags are the popular retail pack but 5# wood boxes still a good promotional item. California clementines/mandarins are in steady supply; eating quality is excellent out of both areas.

**GRAPES:** Imported Chilean and Peru grapes have peaked and beginning to wind down. Red varieties should remain in good supply, particular in Crimson variety. As we move into this latter stage of South American season, look for markets to begin to firm up with price spread between reds and greens with green being in lighter supply. Organic grapes in supply from South Africa on all colors for next 2-4 weeks.

**PINEAPPLES:** Conventional supplies are steady; organic product market is beginning to drop. Should see larger size fruit and lower pricing as soon as this week.

**RASPBERRIES:** Supply has hit a small gap and will be very limited over the next week to two weeks. We should see supply back to normal levels by 4/08.

**STRAWBERRIES:** The strawberry market is the most affected by the weather we are seeing out west. Florida supply has finished up along with the product we would be seeing shipped out of Mexico. The California strawberry situation is getting bleak as rains have moved into the area preventing harvest and growers have to cull their fields of over-ripe product. Supply for the next several weeks will be limited.

## Chilean Stone Fruit

Full variety of Chilean stone fruit continues. Peaches have nice color and sizing; nectarines slowing and blush color becoming lighter. Black and red plums (New Larry Anne variety) coming on are the best quality stone fruit items, both with excellent eating quality. Florida peaches will come available into the late part of March for first domestic stone fruit but may be pushed back to 4/8.

## Tropical Fruit

**BABY FRENCH BEANS:** Market down as Easter pulls over and demand is light

**KIWI:** Steady supplies from Italy/Greece. New Zealand crop set to begin mid-May.

**LIMES:** Prices has firmed up and increased on some sizes, with better demand this week. Size 200 and large remained limited. Overall quality is very nice.

**MANGOES:** Conventional/organic product coming from Mexico; pricing is low and stable. Very promotable right now.

**MARIDOL PAPAYAS/ GOLD PAPAYAS:** Supplies have become lighter after some rains affected growing regions.

**SUGAR SNAP PEAS/SNO PEAS:** Great pricing; predominate Guatemala product. Markets at low point.

## Merchandising Tips

Easter is finally here. Are you ready? Go over the last minute details for huge sales this weekend. Is your floral and produce department's full, fresh, neat and well-staffed? On Monday, clean up any Easter decorations and signs. Get out your holiday record book and make good notes on Easter sales. This should include weather, store sales, department sales, ad items ordered and sold, and other key items. Don't forget to include the extra display items in the records. Put a layout of your department in the file and include where you displayed ad items, tables, spillover and out of department displays. All this will be helpful next year.

Customers will be looking for the great flavor of California strawberries so keep your displays big for big sales! Strawberries will be in demand now through summer, so don't lose any sales. Strawberries generate great sales for you and the total store. Shoppers purchase your berries then add biscuits, cakes, whipped topping, ice cream, glaze, sugar and many other items. Offer more than one size too. For most families, a 1 pound container is not enough. Most buy 2 to 4 pounds at a time. They are also looking for a variety. Create a "Berry Patch" theme. Merchandise raspberries, blackberries, and blueberries next to the strawberries.

Happy Easter from your Crosset Merchandising Team.

### CROSSET NEW ITEM & DELETION SHEET

W/B: 4/8/18

ITEM #	NEW ITEMS	SIZE
69205	OG Black seedless Grapes	9.9#
69455	OG Red seedless Grapes	9.9#
69920	Aloe Vera Leaves	10#
96910	OG Clamshell Kumquats	12/8oz
22313	Mushroom Oyster Fresh	6/4oz.
34273	OG Jonagold Apple	40#/80ct.
23005	Rhubarb	15#
<b>DELETIONS</b>		
62055	Yellow Dragon Fruit	8#
78515	CV Pt Blueberries	12pt
78523	OG PT Blueberries	12pt
69421	OG Red seedless Grapes	18#
89015	Yukon Gold Potato	16/3#
111610	Pummelo	8ct
82010	Sunion Onion	12/3#