

The World Vegetable Center

- **Introduction:** Several species of African eggplant (*ngogwe* in *Kiswahili*) are cultivated but the most common ones are *Solanum aethiopicum* (medium size fruit type), *Solanum anguivi* (small fruit type) and *Solanum macrocarpon* (big fruit type). Fruits of all species are edible. Only leaves of *Solanum macrocarpon* and *S. anguivi* are edible.
- **Varieties:** Bitter, intermediate and sweet varieties exist. AVRDC has selected sweet and slightly bitter fruit types which include lines AB 2 and DB3 which are now being promoted in several countries. However, some communities in prefer the bitter types.



- **Suitable locations:** African eggplant requires less water than tomatoes and prefers sunny conditions. It will grow on a wide range of soils, including sandy loams. It does not cope with waterlogging, and intense shading.

- **Sowing time:** African eggplant is not as susceptible to cold temperatures as other African indigenous vegetables like okra. It can be grown throughout the year in most countries provided that water is available. As African eggplant is susceptible to red spider mite during the hot dry season, growing of nursery seedlings and transplanting should be done well before the start of the hot season.
- **Nursery preparation and characteristics:** Land should be ploughed well, mixed with cow dung, chicken or compost manures at a rate of 3-5 kg/m². The nursery should be in a flat area, with well drained fertile soils, free of shade, near to a water source. It should not have previously grown crops such as tomato, nightshades or sweet peppers over the last couple of years. Diseases left over in the soil from these crops can damage young African eggplant seedlings.

Seeds should be sown in rows, 15-20 cm apart with 1 cm spacing between seeds within a row. After sowing, cover the seeds with a thin layer of soil followed by watering. Thin the seedlings down to 1-2 cm spacing between plants. Weeding should be done whenever necessary to avoid competition with seedlings. Regular watering is also necessary.



- **Transplanting and crop management:** About three weeks after sowing, harden seedlings by slightly reducing the frequency of watering. The seedlings for transplanting are ready in four to six weeks or when they have 4-7 true leaves. The soil should be well prepared and if it is fertile the crop can be grown without fertilizer. In other situations mix in cattle or chicken manure, or compost at a rate of 0.2 -0.5 kg per hole. If manure is not available, CAN or urea fertilizers at a rate of 5 grams per plant can be used

The recommended plant spacing for African eggplant is 75 cm between rows and 50 cm between plants in the row. Weeding should be done whenever necessary and watering during the dry season is very important. Additional top dressing with fertilizer after the third harvest improves subsequent yields. Red spider mites



can cause problems during hot weather and damage shows up as dead leaves. Look for brownish patches under the leaves. They can be controlled using miticides such as Abamectin or Dynamec.

- **Harvest:** For all species except *Solanum macrocarpon*, (the big fruit type) only the fruits are consumed. Leaves of *Solanum macrocarpon* are also edible. Most communities consume unripe fruits which are light green, yellowish or green. However, some West African communities prefer the ripe orange to red fruits.

Harvesting is usually done every week starting two months after transplanting and can last 6-7 months. Old plants that are starting to dry off can be cut back at the base (ratooned) and young shoots will grow and produce fruits after 2-3 months. Harvested fruits are packed in sisal bags for transport to market places and can remain suitable for consumption for a few days.



- **Cooking:** Several recipes involving okra, onion, carrot, tomato, eggs and cooking oil have been developed by the World Vegetable Center and are available as leaflets. The cooking time does not exceed 20 minutes. African eggplant fruits are rich in calcium, phenols, vitamin C, antioxidants and sugar.



- **Seed production:** For seed production, a spacing of 75 cm between rows and 50 cm between plants in the row is recommended. Ripe fruits (yellow, orange, or red color depending on the species) are harvested and the seed is extracted either mechanically using a seed extractor or manually by crushing the fruits placed in sisal bags. Seed is then separated from the pulp, dried and then packed for storage in a cool room until use.

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How to Grow AFRICAN EGGPLANT

A new cash crop
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