

Cultural Details: **Aubergine**

The Aubergine or Egg Plant is a member of the tomato family, to which Peppers also belong. Whilst demand for aubergines is increasing in the U.K., market survey is advisable before becoming involved in large scale growing projects. There is a good outlet selling plants to amateur gardeners. Aubergines require the same scientific approach to feeding, watering, climatic control, pest and disease control etc as Tomatoes if they are to crop well.

Programme: Sow January to March, plant up April onwards.
Cropping starts around five months after sowing.

Culture

Culture is basically similar to Tomatoes, seed (about 220 per gram) being sown in boxes at 18°C 8-10 weeks before planting out. For early crops, seedlings can be raised in a growing room, with controlled temperature and artificial lighting. During propagation, space out the plants well, and do not over-water.

Nutritional levels are similar to Tomatoes, pH 6-6.5 with N, P, K, Mg indices around 3, but susceptibility to high salt levels has been noted by some growers. Spacing of the crop will depend on house width, but in wider spans, double rows 45cm apart at 150cm centres is usual, plants being 40cm apart in the row. In narrow houses or tunnels, planting 45cm square is usually more convenient.

Plants are supported with vertical strings or canes, and also with horizontal ties or loops around the plants to keep them from sprawling if 2-3 stems are allowed to develop. How much pruning to do to avoid overcropping is a matter of some difference of opinion. While 2 or 3 stems can be taken, plants can be maintained on one stem with side shoots reduced beyond the flowers which form. The basic object is to aim for 6-9 fruits per plant, though this can be exceeded on longer term culture. Lower leaves are removed as they become yellow, otherwise they will trail and become diseased.

There is evidence of poor setting of fruit if night temperatures are too high - and as high humidity is also said to encourage poor setting, this may pose management problems. Ideally, the plants seem to respond to higher day, lower night temperatures. Feeding is similar to Tomatoes, with more emphasis on nitrogen to encourage and maintain growth, noting the danger of high salt build-up which will cause fruit blotching.

Pests and diseases are again similar to Tomatoes, with physiological problems most likely to develop due to a combination of high salt levels and high humidity. Monitor the crop with sticky traps to check for the build up of insect pests and treat accordingly. Biological control may be used where feasible

Information provided for guidance only, as cultural practices and climatic circumstances vary.