

# AUBERGINE



## INTRODUCTION

Also known as the eggplant, aubergine is very common in Southern European countries where it is highly prized. The Greek put aubergine in a traditional recipe called moussaka, the French in their traditional recipe, ratatouille, and the Turks in imam bayildi. Actually a fruit, aubergines contain many fine seeds. It has a mild taste and is typically cooked with stronger flavours such as garlic, tomatoes, onions, herbs and spices.

## TYPES

Several varieties of aubergine are available in New Zealand. Skin colours range from a deep purple, almost black, to a light purple with creamy streaks to all white. Shapes are also variable, from the more commonly found pear shaped to long and thin cylindrical shapes. Growing conditions can affect the colouring, for instance a white aubergine may be all white if grown indoors but would have purple streaks if grown outdoors. By far the most commonly found variety is the deep purple pear shaped aubergine.

The large white aubergine can be eaten raw and is often served as a side dish with Thai meals. It tastes similar to beans. The Japanese aubergine, the long thin purple one, also tastes similar to a bean and is often stir-fried with oyster sauce. Even a green-yellow 'banana' aubergine can sometimes be found.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Look for glossy blemish free skin which is firm to the touch and is showing no signs of withering. Decay appears as dark brown spots on the surface and should be avoided as these aubergines will deteriorate rapidly. Aubergines should be heavy in relation to size.

## HOW TO KEEP

Store at 10–12°C with 90–98% relative humidity. Lower temperatures will cause chilling damage. Aubergines are ethylene sensitive which means they should be stored separately from ethylene producing fruits and vegetables.

Consumer Storage: Refrigerate in the crisper.

## NUTRITIONAL VALUE

Aubergines supply vitamins C and B group.

## HOW TO PREPARE

Aubergines are normally used unpeeled. Remove the calyx. Some recipes will instruct slicing the aubergine, sprinkling with salt and leaving for 30 minutes before rinsing thoroughly. This is to drain out any bitterness, but as only very ripe aubergines tend to be bitter, this isn't usually necessary. Recently developed varieties are not bitter. Some aubergines, particularly the smaller ones, are so tender they can be eaten raw.

## WAYS TO EAT THIS VEGETABLE

Aubergines can be fried, baked, grilled or steamed — whole, sliced or cubed. They go well with lamb and chicken and can be cut into chunks and barbecued on kebabs. They're great stuffed with other vegetables and meats. Try some of the traditional recipes listed above.

## WHEN YOU CAN GET IT

Purple varieties are available in plentiful quantities from November until June, other varieties have a more limited supply. Imported aubergines are available in the winter months.

## TIPS FOR RETAILING

Aubergines bruise easily so handle carefully. Display only one layer deep in refrigerated shelving. Many customers will be unaware of how to use aubergines, so experiment with them yourself so you can give first hand advice on preparation and recipes.