

# FARMER IN THE FIELD



## CALIFORNIA EGGPLANT

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As with so many things in life our taste in food stems from what we were exposed to growing up. My mother had one eggplant recipe that I can remember a greyish casserole covered with cheddar cheese and always baked in large quantities. It could have been one of her potluck favorites but not mine. At some point eggplant parmesan entered my life and my opinion of eggplant changed. This is my favorite dish to order at Original Joe's Restaurant in San Jose and I can cook up a pretty good eggplant parmesan myself. When planning a meal I don't think of eggplant. It would be different if we grew some but eggplant likes hot days and warm nights and our climate is coastal influenced. California has three main eggplant production regions: the southern desert valleys (Riverside and San Bernardino counties), the San Joaquin Valley (Stanislaus and Fresno Counties), and the southern coast (Orange County). California is the third largest producer of eggplant in the United States and its popularity is growing. There is even a Loomis Eggplant Festival in Placer County where people who love eggplant flock to in every October.

When eggplant was first grown in China in the 5<sup>th</sup> century the fruit was purple and shaped like an egg but today there are so many different varieties, shapes and colors from purple to red, white to yellow, round to elongate. When choosing your fruit stay away soft and spongy which means "old". Young fruit will have immature seeds and older fruit will have large woody seeds both can result in bitter fruit. Many recipes advise salting, rinsing and draining slice eggplant (known as "degorging"), to reduce bitterness, soften fruit and to reduce the amount of fat absorbed during cooking. With so many ethnic cultures incorporating eggplant in their diets farmers markets are a great place to find some unique varieties and I know I will be in line to get some.