

HOME & GARDEN

Crops that add color to garden and plate

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Recorder Columnist

Purple is the color of crayons, grape soda and royal robes; it is not a color you ordinarily expect to find in the vegetable garden. Still, there are several vegetables that come in purple dress and you may find there are more reasons for growing them than merely the novelty of their color.

Eggplant is the one vegetable that immediately springs to mind as one that is supposed to be purple. Its deeply colored, smooth satiny skin make it one of the most beautiful vegetables in the garden.

Eggplant seeds must be started indoors early in April. When the seedlings are 3 inches high, they should be picked out and planted in individual peat pots. Eggplant is very tender and shouldn't be set out in the garden before mid-June, after they have been properly hardened off. Or you can buy started seedlings at a garden supply store.

Eggplant is a heavy feeder and should be planted in a soil enriched with rotted manure and compost. Arrange the plants about 3 feet apart and mulch well to conserve moisture, especially during this drought. The mulch will also help keep the satiny fruits clean and keep them off the ground.

The biggest problem I have had with eggplant is flea beetles which pepper the leaves with tiny holes. This can interfere with the development of the plant so they should be kept in check with either a sprinkling of wood ashes or rotenone.

Cabbage is another vegetable that fairly commonly comes in purple — sometimes called red cabbage. Ruby Ball and Red Acre are two varieties available from Burpee and there is still time to start some from seed. I have taken half a bed in my garden to use as a nursery. I've added compost and peat moss to make a soil that is rich and light. I've planted one section to broccoli, one to brussel sprouts and one to cabbage. They are sprouting and by the time the peas have gone by these cole seedlings will be large enough to transplant. With the peas gone I will have a new row to plant them in, spacing them about 10 inches apart.

Cabbage should be kept watered and mulched heavily. Because it is a heavy feeder, needing lots of nitrogen. Watering with manure tea after the plants are established is a good way to keep them watered and fertilized.

A head of snowy white cauliflower is a beautiful sight but equally distinctive is "Purple Head," a purple variety from Burpee. It does not need to have the leaves tied over the head to blanch it and it has the advantage of keeping in the garden without becoming "ricey" longer than white cauliflower. Like white cauliflower it can be eaten raw, cooked and it freezes well. However, when cooked it loses its purple color and turns green.

Plant it as you would cabbage, allowing a little more room between plants in the row and be sure not to plant it where other members of the cabbage family grew the year before. Rotating crops, especially heavy feeders, is important.

I've mentioned purple snap beans before. Royal Burgundy is a bush variety again offered by Burpee. To its credit it will tolerate colder soil than regular green beans and it matures in 51 days. This means you can have beans on the table earlier than usual. It is also resistant to bean beetles.

Like the purple cauliflower Royal Burgundy beans turn green when they are cooked.

Pesto lover that I am, I always grow basil and it is a nice change to grow Dark Opal basil, a deep purple variety. There is not much difference in the flavor and I like adding it to my purple patch (more tolerable in the garden than in prose).

Basil is not fussy. Give it an average soil with good drainage in full sun and it will do fine. Pinching back the plant will encourage a busy growth. It is easily started from seed but it is possible to buy basil plants and many other herb plants locally from the Kitchen Garden in Charlemont.

It's fun to try new things in the garden even if you're not ready to try rutabagas or kohlrabi. (Did you know there is a purple variety of kohlrabi, too? It's called Early Purple Vienna.)

N.Y. NEWS CROSSWORD PUZZLE

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|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| ACROSS | 34 — Baba | 55 Auto part | 25 City on the Seine |
| 1 Snake | 35 Stared with open mouth | 61 Related by blood | 26 Solely |
| 6 Fruit basket item | 37 Play | 62 Iroquoian | 27 Kitchen gadget |
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| 14 Dauntless | 40 Dynamo part | 65 Existed | 29 Discourage |
| 15 — podrida | 42 Cluster | 66 Bits of thread | 30 Hawaiian porch |
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| 17 Dugout | 45 Spanish gent | 68 Jug | 33 Was worthy of |
| 18 Air pollutant | 47 Consumed | 69 Eastern practice | 36 Ended |
| 19 Wound a certain way | 48 Story in installments | 70 Weeping | 39 Jailbird |
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| 30 Merchant | 52 Not fat | 1 Rudiments | 51 Engage in argument |
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| | | 3 Hamlet was one | |
| | | 4 Develop gradually | |
| | | 5 In a whirl | |

Yesterday's Puzzle Solved:

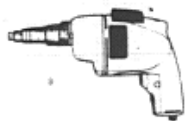
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