

# WHAT'S IN YOUR SUMMER VEGETABLE GARDEN?

Florida vegetable gardening is very different; especially in the summer. What may have worked up north sometimes goes terribly wrong here in Southwest Florida! The careful selection of vegetables adapted to our hot, humid and wet summer climate is the key to success. There may be a few vegetables that you have never tried before, but the adventure of trying something new and the grocery dollar savings experienced will be worth the effort.



Let's begin with a vegetable that almost everybody likes – green beans. One green bean that does very well over our summer months is the **YARD-LONG BEAN** or asparagus bean. Also called Peru bean or snake bean, this long climbing bean produces long, thin pods up to 36 inches long. Needing support via a fence or trellis, this bean can grow 9-12 feet tall and produces colorful violet-blue flowers. Yard-long beans grow fast so you need to pick them before the seeds mature inside the pod. Picked thin and tender, they can be used just like any other green bean. There are several varieties of yard-long beans including a reddish-purple type called 'Red Noodle'.



If you don't like **OKRA**, you need to learn to love it! Okra will produce its head off with lots of tender pods that can be cooked a variety of ways. A relative in the hibiscus family, heat-loving and made for our summer weather, there are about 25 varieties of okra with pods ranging from green to purple to red in color. Locally available varieties of okra at the seed rack include 'Annie Oakley II', 'Cajun Delight', 'Emerald', 'Clemson Spineless', and 'North and South'. Most okra va-

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May 29, 2009

rieties will begin producing in 60-70 days from seed. You need to pick okra every couple of days as the pods rapidly become tough.

Another vegetable that you either love or hate is the **EGGPLANT**. There are many varieties of eggplant available ranging from the classic large-fruited types to the thin, snake-like varieties in purple, white, green, orange, red and striped. Start the seeds just like tomatoes or purchase already started plants in garden centers. It will take at least 70 days from putting the eggplant seedling in the garden to your first harvest. Harvest eggplants while the skin still has a glossy appearance. A dull skin is a sign of an

over mature eggplant and will be bitter. There are at least 56 varieties of eggplants available to gardeners. Besides 'Black Beauty', other large-fruited, dark purple varieties include 'Dusky' and 'Florida Market'. There are also white types such as 'White Beauty' and 'Cloud Nine'. 'Ichiban' is an elongated cultivar that is also very popular. Check seed catalogs and the Internet for additional cultivars and hard-to-find heirlooms.

Don't give up on vegetable gardening just because of the heat. Simply change course a bit and grow some yard-long beans, okra and eggplants!

*Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN*

*Allison Turner, at 764.4351 or email [Allison.Turner@CharlotteFL.com](mailto:Allison.Turner@CharlotteFL.com). Allison can help educate you about the FYN Program so you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while*

*and reducing pollution.*

*contact a  
**MASTER GARDENER**  
on the Plant Lifeline from 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 764.4340 or by email [Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com](mailto:Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com).*

*You can also visit them at one of our many **Plant Clinics** around the county:  
<http://charlotte.ifas.ufl.edu/PlantClinics.pdf>*

#### Resources:

- Stephens, J.M. (2009) Yard-Long Bean. UF/IFAS Extension Service.
- Stephens, J.M., et al (2009) Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide.
- Christman, S. (2004) Solanum melongena. Florida.com. Tallahassee.
- Christman, S. (2007) Abelmoschus esculentus. Florida.com. Tallahassee.

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