

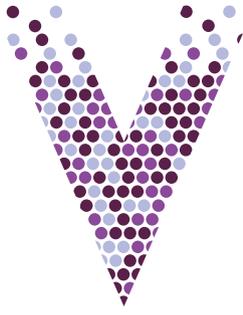


Asian long eggplant



Indian round eggplant

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# Cracking the code on eggplant production

**Viliam Zvalo can talk a purple streak about eggplant, especially if they're Asian long or Indian round varieties.**

The research scientist at Vineland Research and Innovation Centre (Vineland) has spent the past three years working closely with both, figuring out their idiosyncrasies when grown in fields and greenhouses in hopes of making them seem less foreign to Canadian growers.

"It's always a challenge to go with something new but as the research component of this program comes to an end, we have good data to support Canadian farmers," Zvalo said.

His efforts to shine some light on the nightshades is part of Vineland's world crops program, launched in 2010 with the goal of finding ethnocultural vegetables that can be grown here.

Zvalo found the best varieties of Asian long and Indian round eggplant to produce locally, how best to grow them, and just how much can be produced in the right conditions.

Take the Indian round eggplant. The plants producing small, purple ball-shaped versions of the vegetable thrived in the field.

"There's no issue with production in the field," Zvalo said. "But it doesn't really like the greenhouse."

By contrast, Asian long eggplant that Zvalo tested, including the dark purple Japanese variety Orient

Express and a brighter purple Chinese type, not only did well in the field but showed promise in the greenhouse.

The key to high field yields with both Indian and Asian varieties, he noted, was grafting the eggplant onto tomato rootstock. He also discovered non-grafted eggplant grew best under row covers since perforated plastic created too much heat for the young eggplant to bear.

One key difference between Asian long and Indian round varieties in the field is the need to grow the former in a protected area as they are susceptible to wind damage and require fencing for stability and to maintain high yields.

There are still some unanswered questions about these world crops grown under glass. Producing eggplant in greenhouses isn't done anywhere else in the world, so there's opportunity to learn more.

"Growers can easily achieve up to 42 kilograms of fruit per square metre," Zvalo said. "By experimenting with different plant spacing in the greenhouse, we hope to fine-tune production of dark-skinned Japanese long eggplant to increase yield without sacrificing fruit quality."

"It will be up to the greenhouse industry to see the potential and grow this opportunity," he added. "Much like our research on world crops in the field created the impetus for growers to supply locally grown Asian eggplant to retail outlets, the possibility of year-round greenhouse production is an exciting next step."

