

# Eggplants

*Shannon and Ian Jacobs*

We live on the outskirts of Bangkok, on the Chao Phraya river delta in a hot humid climate with no winter, deep topsoil and a good water supply. The ideal vegetables in a home garden here tolerate high temperatures and require a minimum of care. A cultivar of the species *Solanum melongena* is ideal. The plants grow from seed that we save ourselves, thrive almost anywhere, and produce ‘golf-ball’ berries continuously over many months.

An immature berry ready to pick and cook.



We grow the green variety: there are purple and white variants.

Used when immature, this variety is crisp and succulent, more like cucumber than the flaccid spongy texture of larger purple varieties grown in other countries. They have little taste of their own and have low nutritional value, but when halved and lightly cooked in curries they absorb oils and flavors and are delicious.

We grow a second variety with marble-sized green berries. They are somewhat bitter and not common in Western cooking.

### **‘Wild’ eggplant with small berries**



An open bush a little more than a metre high has been growing on our lawn for three years. It's cut back every few months and bears a steady supply of berries that we put in sweet green curry for contrast in taste and texture, a central concept in Thai cooking. Dad didn't grow up here but he really likes them. I don't like them so much.

This variety is closer to a truly wild species and is not attacked by white fly, mealy bugs or the lace bugs that are attracted to the larger fruiting cultivars. We don't spray, so we replace the regular garden plants every few months to avoid problems with these insects.

Plants are useful but insects are often more interesting. The next section is about two massive deliberate infestations that produced interesting results.

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Young female mealy bugs cf. *Coccidohystrix insolitia* settling into position and sucking sap on eggplant leaves.



Note the ant seeking honey dew. Dad carefully left hem alone. By the third generation things were getting nicely out of hand.



A male mealy bug. Adult males do not feed, live for two days and are almost never seen on garden plants.

Find males by sacrificing the plants. Inspect the leaves every day for weeks until you catch a new hatching. When you find them, take photographs. They'll be gone in two days.



The mealy bugs do have a predator. We found this female wasp *Anagyrus pseudococci* during the mealy bug invasion.



It is a parasitoid wasp that lays eggs in a range of mealy bugs. Found alongside the mealy bugs on our eggplants and not seen before or since. There is an article here, and linked below ....

[https://entnemdept.ifas.ufl.edu/creatures/BENEFICIAL/Anagyrus\\_pseudococci.htm](https://entnemdept.ifas.ufl.edu/creatures/BENEFICIAL/Anagyrus_pseudococci.htm)



The second insect described in this article is a lace bug (*Tingidae*). We find them in low numbers on our eggplant leaves and in other gardens. Large numbers are on old eggplants growing on the roadside close to my school.



The lace bugs are 3-4 mm long. Male and female below.





Two freshly molted adults and the final three instars.



Each time they molt they change their appearance.

### **Host plants**

Lace bugs tend to be host specific. We have only seen this species on eggplants and they do not seem to like the wild one we have. Like the mealy bugs we find them only on the cultivars normally grown in gardens.

Mealy bugs have very different looking males and females but the two sexes of all lace bugs are almost identical.

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