

Not just ornamental:100 years of the eggplant in Australia (1827 – 1927)

Paul van Reyk

The Aristologist: vol 14: p 9- 35. Napier, New Zealand. 2023

Recently my culinary curiosity has been circling around the story of the eggplant in Australia. The fat, glossy purple *Solanum melongena* was a staple of my Sri Lankan childhood and has been a regular in my cooking across a range of cuisines – Sri Lankan, Indian, Greek, Italian, Lebanese, and French. My father grew them in the early 1960s in our backyard from seeds smuggled in from Sri Lanka in the suitcases of relatives and friends. An Italian father of a high school friend grew them in his backyard too. To the extent I thought about it at all I supposed it was through migrants like my relatives and the Italian father that the eggplant got its spot in the gardens and on the tables of Australia.

Trawling the internet using eggplant and Australia as my search terms I came across this 2022 statement on the site of *Orchard Tech*, a company which provides services to the agricultural and horticultural industries in Australia:

The eggplant is relatively new to Australia but can be found in many dishes that were first created in other parts of the world. In the popular Greek dish, moussaka, eggplant and lamb are gently simmered with aromatic spices, blanketed with a feta-infused white sauce and baked in the oven.¹

This is the kind of statement that is a red rag to my culinary historian bull. It raises three questions for me: first for which Australia is the eggplant relatively new; second how new is ‘relatively new’; third were there no dishes through which Australians encountered eggplants that were not ‘first created in other parts of the world’. This article is my answer to these questions.

To answer the first question. The eggplant has been a commonly used culinary vegetable in different regions of the world for centuries. L. Terry Weese and Lynn Bohs in 2010 used DNA sequence data to show that eggplants arose in Africa and were dispersed throughout the Middle East to Asia.² ‘They arrived in Europe’ writes Alan Davidson, British food historian, ‘both through the invasion of Spain by the Moors (711) and by means of Italian trade with the Arabs.(for which various dates are given between the 9th century and the 12th) ... The aubergine has for some time been firmly established in regional cuisines (Greek, Levantine, Italian, Provençal).³

I submit that migrants from these regions living in Australia are not those for whom the eggplant was/is ‘relatively new’. I think by implication the Australia of the quote is British settlers and their descendants. (I use the term ‘settler’ for this group in this article.) It is with them that my myth-busting interest lies, and they who are the subject of this article and through whom I answer my other two questions. I show that the eggplant has been grown in settler vegetable/kitchen gardens and served at their tables for just short of 200 years putting paid to the notion that it is ‘relatively new to Australia’. In both garden and table the eggplant won its place through integration into pre-existing settler gardening and culinary practice. As Australia was till Federation in 1901 a collection of British colonies and settler cuisine was basically British cuisine⁴, for the purposes of this article I

¹ Eggplant Growth and Production in Australia (2020) - Orchard Tech

² Weese Terri 7 Bohs, Lynn, ‘Eggplant Origins: Out of Africa, into the Orient’. Abstract published 1 February 2010 <https://doi.org/10.1002/tax.591006>

³ David, Alan, *Oxford Companion to Food*, Oxford University Press, 1999 p.39

⁴ Van Reyk, Paul, *True to the Land. A History of Food in Australia*, Reaktion Books Ltd, London, p.58

treat Britain and Australia as *one cuisine entity - settler cuisine* though geographically the two were in 'other parts of the world'.

I cover the first 100 years of the eggplant's life in Australia from its first reference in 1827 to 1927. My source materials are: digitised newspapers and magazines in *Trove*, the online library database owned by the National Library of Australia, and from Australian cookery books published between 1864 and 1925. 1864 was the year of publication Edward Abbott's 1864 book *The English and Australian Cookery Book: Cookery for the Many, as well as the Upper Ten Thousand - by an Australian Aristologist*.⁵ Abbotts' book is generally considered the first published Australian cookery book.

Dating the eggplant in Australia

The earliest evidence for the eggplant in Australia comes from a list of 120 esculent (fit to be eaten) vegetables and pot herbs cultivated in the Botanic Gardens, Sydney, compiled by Charles Fraser, Colonial Botanist and Superintendent of the Government Garden (which subsequently became the Royal Botanic Gardens) and dated December 1827. Fraser listed three varieties of eggplant: large oval, round flat and holly leafed.⁶ Fraser doesn't note the colour of the fruit of each, whether purple, white, green, orange, striped etc. They may have all been types of the purple or a mix of purple and white as these were the more common edible varieties in circulation. Fraser listed the brenal (sic) or egg plant as one of 12 Culinary Vegetable(s) in the 1831 *Australian Almanack* (sic).

Brenal- or egg plant, an excellent summer vegetable, should be sown in August, and transplanted in October, and will be ready for use in December.⁷

[*Brenal* is a variant spelling of *brinjal* the modern Indian name for *Solanum melongena* deriving from the Portuguese *brinjela* in turn derived from the Arabic *bādinjān* which may also be the name from which Hindi *baigan* derived. (Other variants for brinjal that are found in early Australian recipes cited in this article are *brignal*, *bringal*, *bringhall* and *bringales*. The name brinjal may have been 'adopted' into English during the colonisation of India by the British and travelled to Australia with Britons who had lived in India or served in the military in India and migrated to Australia, or Britons with Indian experience in the military who were posted to Australia. Egg-plant, egg fruit aubergine are also used in recipes cited in this article. Egg-plant/fruit because when coined in the late 18th century the small white fruit of a variety was thought similar in appearance to a hen's egg (sometimes a goose's egg).⁸ It appears as egg-plant and egg plant which I will use in situ, otherwise I will use eggplant. Aubergine was first noted in 1775 from French from Catalan *alberginera*, from Arabic *al-badinjan* also.⁹]

In Fraser's list of culinary vegetables the eggplant stands out as one of two to have an evaluative comment in its entry - 'an excellent summer vegetable' - and not simply brief practical instructions

⁵ Abbott, Edward, *The English and Australian Cookery Book: Cookery for the Many, as well as the Upper Ten Thousand - by an Australian Aristologist*, Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, London, 1864

⁶ *Solanum melongena*, List of esculent vegetables and pot herbs cultivated in the Botanic Gardens, Sydney, December 1827, Caroline Simpson Library & Research Collection | Museums of History NSW - Full Record (mhnsw.au)

⁷ Fraser, Charles Esq, Colonial Botanist, 'Memoranda of Australian Fruit and Vegetables', *Australian Almanack for the year of our lord 1831*, Edited, Printed and published by Ralph Mansfield, Gazette Office, p. 155, accessed at Trove 2 January 2023 ([1831](https://trove.nla.gov.au)) (nla.gov.au)

⁸ Online Etymology Dictionary accessed 13 January 2023

⁹ Online Etymology Dictionary accessed 13 January 2023

for cultivation.¹⁰ Fraser must have eaten the eggplant to give it such a recommendation, but I could find no record of this. Why did he say it at all? Was he trying to popularise a vegetable he thought was worthy of culinary attention but was being unfairly shunned? That people overlooked the culinary qualities of the eggplant, through ignorance or prejudice, is a constant complaint of eggplant commentators and recipe writers over the years covered by this article as will be shown later.

Where did Fraser get the seeds or stock? Did more than the name 'brenal/brinjal' travel to Australia with Britons post India – eggplant seeds? Perhaps he got them in exchange for some seeds he provided to another botanist or horticulturalist. (See below re Acclimatisation Society of Sydney and seed swaps.)

Perhaps Fraser bought them from a seed seller in the colonies. Eggplants are listed in the 1836 'Catalogue of Seeds and Plants, indigenous and exotic, cultivated and on sale' from Denmark Hill Nursery in Tasmania.¹¹ Eggplant stock were being sold by Thomas Shepherd from his nursery in Chippendale in 1852.¹² David H Railton, Seedsman, in 1867 was selling eggplant seeds at 6d per oz.¹³ The eggplant seeds were one of the items he offered free (ex-postage) to 'encourage settlement on the lands'. In 1882 Filmer's Great Northern Seed Stores were selling 'seeds imported from Europe every four months' at 8d per packet.¹⁴ Other seed sellers didn't specify that their seeds were imported but they may have been.

Non-culinary uses - The eggplant as showpiece

Eggplants were cultivated for their ornamental qualities in the home flower garden. In October 1847 eggplant seedlings at 9d each were advertised by R Drury's Stores in their list of flower seeds for sale.¹⁵ In 1887 the Adelaide Observer noted that 'The black Nankin and the crimson are more grown for ornament than for use'.¹⁶ 'The aubergine — especially the black-fruited kind — is also trailed as an ornamental plant on fences, trellises, and walls', reported the *Australian Town and Country Journal* in 1917.¹⁷ They were exhibited for their ornamental quality at agricultural and horticultural

¹⁰ The other vegetable that gets a comment in the list is 'Spinage – New South Wales or New Zealand considered superior to the English'. This is the warrigal green, *Tetragonia tetragonioides*. Fraser seems to have been an early advocate for native food at the settler's table.

¹¹ 'Catalogue of seeds and plants...' *The Hobart Town Courier* (Tasmania), 15 July 1836, p.1 accessed at Trove 30 December 2022, [15 Jul 1836 - Classified Advertising - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

¹² Newling, Jacqui, Honorary Associate in History, The University of Sydney, informal discussion with Paul van Reyk on eggplants and their place in the culinary repertoire over time.

¹³ David E Railton, 'Garden Seeds Finest Quality', *Leader* (Melbourne), 9 November 1867, p.32, accessed at Trove 1 January 2023, [09 Nov 1867 - Advertising - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

See also John Baptist Seeds, *Freeman's Journal* (Sydney), 22 August 1850, p.7, accessed at Trove 1 January 2023, [22 Aug 1850 - Advertising - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#);

¹⁴ Filmer's Great Northern Seed Stores, *The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser* (New South Wales), 23 September 1882, p.8, accessed at Trove 1 January 2023, [23 Sep 1882 - Classified Advertising - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

¹⁵ R Drury's Stores, *Colonial Times* (Hobart), 8 October 1847, p.4, accessed at Trove 1 January 2022, [08 Oct 1847 - Advertising - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#). See also R.T.Vale, Seedsman, Ovens and Murray Advertiser, 5 August 1858 p.4, accessed at Trove 31 December 2022 [05 Aug 1858 - Advertising - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

¹⁶ 'Aubergines of Egg Fruits', *Adelaide Observer* (South Australia), 25 June 1887, p.10, accessed at Trove 23 December, [25 Jun 1887 - AUBERGINES, OR EGG-FRUITS. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#),

¹⁷ 'Aubergine or Egg-plant', *Australian Town and Country Journal*, (Sydney), 18 April 1917, p.3, accessed at Trove, 28 December 2022 [18 Apr 1917 - Aubergine or Egg-Plant. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

shows.¹⁸ Captain Forster won 2s 6d for his eggplants at the exhibition of the Hobart Horticultural Society in March 1840, the entry submitted in the category 'Flowers',¹⁹ a category under which they would continue to be entered.²⁰

They were exhibited as fruits, singly or in a collection with other fruit.²¹ In the Gardener's and Amateur's Show of 1846 in Hobart Mr. Bicheno created some consternation among the judges for exhibiting 'a fine eggplant but as we are not aware whether it is of the edible variety, we know not if we may class it among the fruits'.²²

Eggplants also were entered in competition at these shows singly as a vegetable or as part of a collection. They were one of the vegetables in a collection exhibited at the 1842 South Australian Agricultural and Horticultural Society's Exhibition alongside French beans, Cape gooseberries, turnips, cabbages, parsnips, carrots, celery, onions, and tomatoes, the eggplant notably here not being treated as an exotic but on par with more familiar settler vegetables.²³ In 1847 Mr H.H. Browne won a 'first minor prize' for his eggplant at the South Australian Agricultural and Horticultural Society's Exhibition.²⁴

Non-culinary uses – The eggplant as object of scientific inquiry

Acclimatisation Societies were formed to introduce plants and animals from across the British Empire that would in their members view beautify the landscape and provide opportunities for fishing and hunting game.²⁵ They were also very interested in the commercial possibilities of introduced crops. In February 1867 Eduardo San Just, the Spanish Consul, gave to the Acclimatisation Society of Sydney a parcel of several seeds from the Botanic Garden in Madrid among which were three varieties of egg-plant which had been requested by the Society. This was in exchange for unspecified seeds and plants he had taken to the Madrid Botanic Garden on behalf of the Sydney Society.²⁶ The minutes of the meeting don't say what the Society would do with the seeds. Perhaps the seeds from Madrid were descendants of the original eggplant stock brought to

¹⁸ See for example 'Launceston Gardeners' and Amateur Horticultural Society', *The Cornwall Chronicle* (Launceston), 27 January 1858, p.58, accessed at Trove 27 Jan, [1858 - Advertising - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#); 'Ballarat Horticultural Society', *The Ballarat Star* (Victoria), 17 March 1866, p.4 accessed at Trove 2 January 2023, [17 Mar 1866 - BALLARAT HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#);

¹⁹ 'Flowers, Hobart Horticultural Society', *The Austral-Asiatic Review Tasmanian and Australian Advertiser* (Hobart), 31 March 1840, p.8, accessed at Trove 30 December, [31 Mar 1840 - Advertising - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

²⁰ See for example 'Launceston Gardeners' and Amateurs' Horticulture Show', *The Cornwall Chronicle* (Launceston), 27 January 1858, p.3, accessed at Trove 31 December 27, [Jan 1858 - Advertising - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

²¹ See for example 'The Agricultural Show', *Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser* (Queensland), 3 July 1873, p.2 accessed at Trove 21 January 2023, [03 Jul 1873 - THE AGRICULTURAL SHOW. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#); 'The Gawler Show', *South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail* (Adelaide), 4 March 1876, p.1, accessed at Trove 23 January, [04 Mar 1876 - THE GAWLER SHOW. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

²² 'Gardener's and Amateur's Horticultural Show' *The Hobart Town Advertiser* (Tasmania), 11 December 1846 p.4, accessed at Trove 30 December 11 Dec, [1846 - \[?\]ARDENERS' & AMATEURS' HORTICULTURAL SHOW. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

²³ 'Agricultural Produce', *Adelaide Chronicle and South Australian Literary Record* (South Australia), 23 February 1844, p.4, accessed at Trove 31 December, [23 Feb 1842 - AGRICULTURAL AND HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY'S EXHIBITION. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

²⁴ 'Australian Floral and Horticultural Society', *Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney,) 1 October 1847, p2, accessed at Trove 26 December 2022, [Search - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

²⁵ Van Reyk, Paul, *True to the land. A history of food in Australia*, Reaktion, London, 2021 p.80

²⁶ 'Acclimatisation Society', *Sydney Morning Herald* (New South Wales), 25 February 1867, p.5, accessed at Trove 2 January, [26 Feb 1867 - ACCLIMATISATION SOCIETY. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

for seed, chillies, and egg-plants.³⁰

These became more discursive. Sectioned into various Gardens e.g. Kitchen or Vegetable Garden, Fruit Garden and Flower Garden, they discussed the weather, irrigation, soil types in which particular vegetables or fruit would do well, manures, mulching, drainage, sowing, transplanting, thinning out pruning, the impact of different practices like grafting. The eggplant is often mentioned along with the common settler vegetables.³¹

Tomato, capsicum, and egg-plant seed may be sown in hotbeds in which also marrows, melons, and cucumbers may be sown, if not already done. At this time a sowing of the whole of the cucumber tribe may be made for planting out in the open ground at the proper season.³²

[Hotbeds are miniature greenhouses. 'The main reason to use a hot box is to extend the growing season. There are several ways to do this ... For instance, you can start seeds outside rather than inside, when it's still too cold to start them directly in the ground.'³³]

In all the examples above the eggplant was listed as one several vegetables. In 1873 the *Australian Town and Country Journal* devoted a whole column to the egg plant. While, the article said, the eggplant has been a 'handsome culinary fruit' in Europe and Asia for centuries, in Australia it 'has been many years one of our garden plants, it has been cultivated more as a curious ornament than as a delicate and desirable dish for the table'. The article sets about detailing varieties, has an extensive description of cultivation, and ways of cooking.³⁴ The following year, 1874, the *Weekly Times* similarly ran an entire broadsheet column on 'The Cultivation of the Egg Plant', combating prejudice against it (discussed later in this article) and going into quite lot of detail of its cultivation including seed saving.

The seed will retain its gestating powers for seven years and saving it the largest and best shaped should be selected. These should be allowed to get perfectly ripe before they are gathered, and be kept in a dry place, leaving the seed in them till required for use.³⁵

³⁰ 'Gardeners and Farmers Calendar. September', *The Australian* (Sydney), 2 September 1844 p.2, accessed at Trove 28 December 2022 [02 Sep 1844 - GARDENERS' AND FARMERS' CALENDAR - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/02_Sep_1844_-_GARDENERS'_AND_FARMERS'_CALENDAR);

³¹ See 'Kitchen Garden, The Garden Calendar for August', *The Goulburn Herald and Chronicle* (New South Wales), 13 August 1864, p.2, accessed at Trove 2 January, [13 Aug 1864 - THE GARDEN.—CALENDAR FOR AUGUST. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/13_Aug_1864_-_THE_GARDEN.-CALENDAR_FOR_AUGUST); 'The Vegetable Garden, Calendar for November', *The Tarrangower Times and Maldon District Advertiser* (Victoria), 8 November 1861, p.4, accessed at Trove 2 January, [08 Nov 1861 - CALENDAR FOR NOVEMBER. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/08_Nov_1861_-_CALENDAR_FOR_NOVEMBER); 'Agricultural', *Maryborough Chronicle Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser* (Queensland), 28 August 1880, p.4, accessed at Trove 28 December, 2022, [28 Aug 1880 - AGRICULTURAL - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/28_Aug_1880_-_AGRICULTURAL); 'Garden Reminders' *Western Star and Roma Advertiser* (Queensland), 29 September 1894 p.3, accessed at Trove 28 December 2022, [29 Sep 1894 - Garden Reminders. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/29_Sep_1894_-_Garden_Reminders)

³² 'Gardening Operations for the Week', *Geelong Advertiser* (Victoria), 27 June 1873, p.4, accessed at Trove 1 January, [27 Jun 1873 - GARDENING OPERATIONS FOR THE WEEK. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/27_Jun_1873_-_GARDENING_OPERATIONS_FOR_THE_WEEK).

³³ Ellis, Mary Ellen, 'What Is A Hot Bed – Tips For Gardening In A Hot Box' Gardening Know How, accessed 3 February 2023 , Homemade Garden Hot Box Design: How To Build A Garden Hot Box (gardeningknowhow.com)

³⁴ 'The Egg Plant', *The Cultivator, Australian Town and Country Journal*, 14 June 1873, pp 12-13 accessed at Trove 24th January 2023, [p12 - 14 Jun 1873 - Australian Town and Country Journal \(Sydney, NSW : 1870 - 1919\) - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/p12_-_14_Jun_1873_-_Australian_Town_and_Country_Journal_(Sydney,_NSW:_1870_-_1919))

³⁵ 'The Cultivation of the Eggplant' *Weekly Times* (Melbourne) ,21 November, 1874 p.6. accessed at Trove 26 January 2023, [21 Nov 1874 - THE CULTIVATION OF THE EGG PLANT. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](https://trove.nla.gov.au/21_Nov_1874_-_THE_CULTIVATION_OF_THE_EGG_PLANT)

I found just one instance of describing home cultivation of the eggplant from someone with direct experience of it. In 1899 D. O'Connor wrote to the *Armidale Chronicle*:

(The eggplant) is a vegetable of considerable excellence and has the merit of being hardy and easily cultivated—as easily, in fact, as the tomato, to which it is allied, being a *Solanum*. Care should be taken to gather the bringal before it loses its prime otherwise it is unpalatable. The purple-tinted, of which there are several-varieties, is usually cultivated for the table; it should be picked before it loses its brilliant purple hue. It is an annual, but it continues bearing for some time in Queensland. I have had it fruit three years in succession. I have grown the white kind, which is also edible, and recently a white, striped with purple, which was as good as the purple.³⁶

[O'Connor was the honorary auditor of the Royal Society of Queensland and interested in acclimatisation which may explain his experimenting with different varieties of the eggplant.]

It's clear that since at least by 1844 when the eggplant appears in a garden calendar along with turnips, peas and beans, cucumbers, pumpkins, and other common culinary vegetables, the comment in the *Australian Town and Country Journal* notwithstanding, the eggplant was being grown in the home vegetable/kitchen garden not as an exotic but very much as a common culinary vegetable.

The eggplant in the market

If you didn't have a garden in which to grow your own, you could buy eggplants commercially grown. As early as 1841 they were being sold in the Sydney Market for 1s a dozen.³⁷ In 1887 they were being sold at 4d each.³⁸ In 1901 eggplants were being sold in the vegetable market in Sydney for 1/6 per dozen bunches.³⁹

In 1854, C Duffield, seed seller, was promoting his eggplant seeds including purple eggplant explicitly to Farmers and Market Gardeners for growing eggplants at a commercial scale.⁴⁰

But access via markets was not guaranteed. D. O'Connor's letter quoted above, under the heading 'A Neglected Vegetable' bemoaned:

Although the climate of Queensland is eminently suitable to the product of a great variety of vegetables in abundance, our markets are generally very poorly supplied; the bringal, egg-fruit or aubergine being rarely seen.⁴¹

Eggplants were also on sale in local fruit and vegetable shops. In 1912 the *Sunday Times* reported:

³⁶ 'A neglected vegetable,' *The Armidale Chronicle* (New South Wales), 1 July 1899 ,p.5, accessed at Trove 2 January, [01 Jul 1899 - A NEGLECTED VEGETABLE. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#). O'Connor was the honorary auditor of the Royal Society of Queensland and was interested in acclimatisation.

³⁷ 'Sydney Markets', *Sydney Herald* (New South Wales), 8 May 1841, p.3 , accessed at Trove 28 December 2022, [08 May 1841 - SYDNEY MARKETS. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

³⁸ 'Retail Prices. Commercial,' *South Australian Weekly Chronicle* (Adelaide), 30 April 1887, p.3, accessed at Trove 2 January, [30 Apr 1887 - RETAIL PRICES. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

³⁹ 'The Vegetable Market', *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 22 July 1901, p.7, accessed at Trove 2

⁴⁰ 'Change of Seed', *The Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News* (Western Australia), 15 September 1854, p.2, accessed at Trove 6 January 2023, [15 Sep 1854 - Classified Advertising - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁴¹ 'A neglected vegetable,' *The Armidale Chronicle* (New South Wales), 1 July 1899 ,p.5, accessed at Trove 2 January ,[01 Jul 1899 - A NEGLECTED VEGETABLE. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

Just at present a few fruits of what is known as the egg fruit may be seen in a couple of shop windows ... The price asked for these fruits varies according to size, and few of them are sold at less than 4d. each. Market gardeners would do well to plant out a bed of egg fruit plants.⁴²

In April 1917 the *Australian Town and Country Journal* noted inter alia:

Many of the Sydney and suburban fruit shops now have exceptionally fine samples of egg-plant on sale, mostly of the purple variety. The wholesale prices are reasonable, this being one of the best seasons on record here; 2s per dozen for prime small; 2s 6d to 3s for medium size to large; to 4s for extra large.

Some of the Botany, Fairfield, Canterbury, and Kogarah gardeners keep Sydney well supplied. A large percentage of the largest and best samples (purple) are grown (in season) near Young for this market.

The culture of the egg-plant in Sydney suburbs has trebled within the last 10 years. (Author's emphasis)⁴³

The eggplant at the settler table

What were those growing or buying eggplants doing with the fruit? The earliest Australian material I found on ways of cooking the eggplant were these two responses to a reader's enquiry of a newspaper both published in 1865.

Culinary Notes and Queries

The Fruit of the Eggplant—Sir,— Would you be kind enough to inform me if the fruit of the egg-plant is used as a vegetable; and if so, how is it cooked?—New Chum.⁴⁴ (A 'New Chum' was a recent British migrant.)

The responses were as follows:

Egg-plant.

Sir,—In reply to the inquiry of " New Chum," I beg to state that the fruit of the egg-plant (*Solanum melongena*) is commonly eaten in India—that is, the purple variety; the white, I do not remember to have seen during a residence on that country of nearly twelve years. The ordinary mode of cooking is to boil the fruit whole until soft, then halve them; scoop out and mash the pulp, adding pepper, salt, and fresh butter; return it into the shells, grate stale bread over, and let them stand in a warm oven for a few minutes; to be served up and eaten while hot. The dish is by no means bad; and where turnips, pumpkins, or vegetable marrow cannot be had, the baingan — Anglice, brinjal—affords a tolerable substitute. It is also occasionally sliced and fried in ghee, with onions and chilies; but the former is to my taste much the best. I should not consider the plant worth cultivating in this country as an esculent.

Melmoth Hall

Melbourne, Sept. 18⁴⁵.

⁴² "The Egg Fruit, *Sunday Times* (Perth), 10 March 1912, p.24, accessed at Trove 2 January, [10 Mar 1912 - THE EGG FRUIT. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁴³ 'Aubergine or Egg-plant', *Australian Town and Country Journal* (Sydney), 18 April 1917, p.3, accessed at Trove 28 December 2022, [18 Apr 1917 - Aubergine or Egg-Plant. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁴⁴ 'The Fruit of the Egg-plant. Culinary Notes and Queries', *The Australasian* (Melbourne), 16 September 1865, p5, accessed at Trove 28 December 2022, [16 Sep 1865 - COLINARY NOTES AND QUERIES. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#).

⁴⁵ 'Eggplant', *The Australasian* (Melbourne), 23 September 1865, p.9, accessed at Trove 28 December 2022, [23 Sep 1865 - Egg-plant. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

The Egg-plant Fruit – Sir – In your issue of last week you request a reply may be given by any of your readers in what way the egg-plant fruit may be cooked. I have much pleasure in doing so, for having resided in Jamaica for a long period, where the eggfruit fruit, or as it is called over there ‘garden egg’ abounds, you may safely rely on my information,

It should be sliced like a cucumber, only thicker, say a quarter of an inch thick, lay the slices then in salt and water for one hour; take them out and dry in a cloth. Then place in a frying pan of boiling lard or clear dripping. Fry until slightly brown, but not crisp. Another mode of dressing them is : — Boil the eggs with the stems on in water until tender, take them out, slice the tops off so as to allow of the fruit being taken out, mix this with highly spiced minced meat, put again into their skins, and then quickly bake in an oven with plenty of lard about them. This latter way is generally used when the fruit is very large. I may, however, state that the garden egg is considered a vegetable, and not a fruit.— Jamaica, Ballarat, Sept.21.⁴⁶

[In all the recipes in this article the variety being cooked is likely to have been coloured purple as in India, though white varieties were also grown. In 1837 Stevenson had taken seeds of ‘the purple and globe white’ to his lecture at the Mechanics Institute.⁴⁷ The *Adelaide Observer* in 1887 said: the purple is the only one that it is advisable to grow for the table’.⁴⁸ The aforementioned 1917 article in *Australian Town and Country Journal* noted ‘ Of late years the Sydney retail buyers have shown a preference for the New York Purple (spineless), which is early and prolific. The Long White is well-known here. The Black Beauty is an early sort; large, with a brilliant shiny black rind. The Long White China is grown extensively’.⁴⁹ In 1923 the *Farmer and the Settler* notes ‘The varieties [available for the vegetable/kitchen garden] are Black Beauty, which is a purplish black; Large Purple, and White— all similar in habit, but differing in the colour of fruit’.⁵⁰]

I find the 30+ year gap of any recipes for the eggplant between Charles Fraser’s 1831 description of it as a ‘delicious summer vegetable’ and the appearance of these two responses puzzling. I have argued above that there is good evidence to show that the eggplant was being grown in kitchen gardens since the mid-1840s. Was there, despite all these instances of treating the eggplant as a culinary vegetable, simply not the critical mass of eggplant eaters and the culinary curious to warrant attention to it? Melmoth Hall wrote that ‘the fruit of the egg-plant (*Solanum melongena*) is commonly eaten in India’. Is the implication of this that the eggplant was not commonly eaten in Australia? In 1877 the *Horticultural Magazine and Gardening Guide* said of the eggplant: ‘In the Australian colonies the fruit is seldom used, though it can be grown with little trouble. Generally speaking the plants are only cultivated as curiosities, from the appearance of the fruit and but few are aware of the culinary purposes.’⁵¹ This is a theme that runs through later articles about the eggplant: they are easy to grow, generally Australians do not know its culinary use, and here is a recipe or two to encourage you to try them.

⁴⁶ ‘The Eggplant Fruit. Culinary Notes and Queries,’ *Freeman’s Journal* (Sydney), 28 October 1865, p.683, accessed at Trove 28 December 2022, [28 Oct 1865 - CULINARY NOTES AND QUERIES. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁴⁷ ‘Gardening in South Australia’, *South Australian Register* (Adelaide), 5 October 1839, p.3, accessed at Trove 4 January 2023, [05 Oct 1839 - GARDENING IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA – Tro,ve \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁴⁸ ‘Aubergines of Egg Fruits’, *Adelaide Observer* (Adelaide), 25 June 1887 p.10, accessed at Trove 23 December 2022, [25 Jun 1887 - AUBERGINES, OR EGG-FRUITS. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁴⁹ ‘Aubergine or Egg-plant’, *Australian Town and Country Journal* (Sydney), 18 April 1917, p.3, accessed at Trove 28 December 2022, [8 Apr 1917 - Aubergine or Egg-Plant. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁵⁰ ‘The Egg Fruit’, *The Farmer and Settler* (Sydney), 5 October 1923 p.11, accessed at Trove 28 December 2022, [05 Oct 1923 - THE EGG FRUIT. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁵¹ *Horticultural magazine and garden guide*, Vol 1 No 10, October 1877, p. 233, accessed at Trove [THE EGG PLANT. \(30 September 1877\) - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

For example:

Aubergines. Or Egg Fruit

Solanum ovigerum, or S. esculentum, of S. Melongena, i.e. the botanical name of the Indian Brinjal, the French aubergine, the English egg-fruit, the Arabic bydendjan, is better known and appreciated in the countries named, and in Spain also, than amongst the Australian colonists. The fruit of the purple variety, which is the best flavoured is by far the largest, and will occasionally weigh 8 or 10 lb. It is used generally as a flavouring for soups, gravies, &c., but is a most delicious, rich, marrowy vegetable when dressed with gravy, butter, &c. Cut in thin slices, removing all the seeds, they are a delicious accompaniment to a sweetbread, a cutlet, or a tender steak. The slices should be fried brown in fresh butter, and be flavoured with a sliced lemon and cayenne pepper. ... The black Nankin and the crimson are more grown for ornament than for use, and the purple is the only one that it is advisable to grow for the table.⁵²

This lack of take-up of the culinary eggplant was regularly compared with the place of the eggplant in other countries.

Very few people here use the brinjal (or egg-fruits, or aubergines), and yet in Spain, in France, and especially in India, they are regarded as a very valuable vegetable.⁵³

‘Though the prejudices against it have disappeared, ‘the fruit of the egg plant is little used, either in Great Britain or the Australian colonies. But upon the continent of Europe their use is as common, as in the case of the tomato, and in the vegetable markets of Paris and other large cities they are sold in large quantities They are also much used in most tropical countries, and in the southern States of America they are a common dish’.⁵⁴

[The prejudices referred to was a fear of the supposed deleterious effects of ingesting eggplants. This prejudice was put down to John Gerarde who in 1597 in the first written record of the plant in England wrote a ‘herball’ in which he advised against eating the ‘Madde or raging apple’ which had ‘miscellaneous (mischievous) qualities.’ and that the English should ‘content themselves with the meate and sauce of our owne country’.⁵⁵ There was more generally ‘a popular prejudice that formerly prevailed in England against all plants belonging to the order Solanaceae, as they were supposed to possess deleterious qualities.’⁵⁶

Others also were critical of the lack of culinary interest in the eggplant in Britain:

‘Another most valuable plant, unknown in this country save as an ornament in the quasi-tropical gardens or in shrivelled specimens in the windows of the foreign dealers in Covent Garden Market, is that for which we have no English name Solanum melongena, the purple

⁵² ‘Aubergines of Egg Fruits’, *Adelaide Observer* (South Australia) 25 June 1887, p.10, accessed at Trove [25 Jun 1887 - AUBERGINES, OR EGG-FRUITS. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁵³ ‘Kitchen Garden Crops for summer and Autumn Eating’, *Adelaide Observer* (Adelaide), 8 August 1885, p.10, accessed at Trove 26 December, [08 Aug 1885 - KITCHEN GARDEN. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁵⁴ ‘The Cultivation of the Eggplant’, *Weekly Times* (Melbourne), 21 November, 1874 p.6, accessed at Trove 26 January 2023, [21 Nov 1874 - THE CULTIVATION OF THE EGG PLANT. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁵⁵ Gerarde, John, *The Herball, or, Generall Historie of plantes*, p.274 accessed at Internet Archive, 27th January 2023 [The Herball, or, Generall historie of plantes /gathered by John Gerarde of London, master in chirurgerie. : Dodoens, Rembert, : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

⁵⁶ Horticultural magazine and garden guide, Vol 1 No 10, October 1877 p. 232 [THE EGG PLANT. \(30 September 1877\) - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

variety of the egg plant'.⁵⁷

English recipe books, commonly used in colonial Australia do not generally feature eggplant recipes. None have been identified in the selection immediately to hand: *The Experienced English Housekeeper*, Elizabeth Raffald 1816; *The Cook's Oracle* William Kitchener 1817; *Modern Cookery for Private Families*, Eliza Acton 1845; *A Shilling Cookery Book*, Alexis Soyer 1854, or *Beeton's Book of Household Management* (1861, 1888). *Mrs Beeton's All About Cookery* [Dictionary of cookery] (circa 1900-1905) has one entry - Baked aubergine.

Perhaps this is why New Chum made their inquiry: because they had never seen an eggplant until arriving in New South Wales or couldn't find a recipe book to help him.]

The theme of the lack of knowledge of the culinary uses of the eggplant among Australians of course begs the same question I asked in the introduction to this article – of which Australians was this true? It was not true for migrants from regions where the eggplant had been part of the cuisine for centuries. It was not true of those in Australia who had lived in India. The Australians who lacked knowledge of the eggplant were settlers and their descendants. The only acknowledgment I found that the eggplant was eaten by non-settler Australians is this from 1917 :

Some Italian and Greek residents in Sydney split the fruit open, chop it up with mushrooms, and fry.⁵⁸

Would that those who submitted opinion pieces or just recipes to newspapers had asked their non-settler neighbour how they cooked eggplant. How different would be the collection of recipes which I had to work with for this article.

But was there really a neglect of the eggplant by settler Australians? There was clearly enough of a demand for them to sustain commercial cropping. So the question remains, how were these eggplant fanciers, small as they may have been in numbers, preparing the vegetable?

What strikes me about the Hall and 'Jamaica' recipes is that with the exception of Hall's less preferred dish (sliced and fried in ghee, with onions and chilies) they are ways of cooking common to British cuisine hence settler cuisine: sliced and fried with or without crumbing or batter and stuffed with or without minced meat. More particularly, they are ways of cooking the vegetable marrow (courgette, zucchini) as is sometimes noted:

The most common method is frying slices in batter in which way small vegetable marrows are often cooked.⁵⁹

When simply boiled like the vegetable marrow, they are; very similar in taste and; appearance to. that vegetable.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ 'The Egg Plant, Horticultural', *Weekly Times* (Melbourne), 12 August 1893, p.29, accessed at Trove 23 December 2022, [12 Aug 1893 - The Egg Plant. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁵⁸ 'Aubergine or Egg-plant', *Australian Town and Country Journal*, (Sydney), 18 April 1917, p.3, accessed at Trove 28 December 2022, [18 Apr 1917 - Aubergine or Egg-Plant. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁵⁹ 'Egg Fruit, Correspondence', *Leader* (Melbourne) 5 June 1869 p. 7 accessed at Trove 2 January 2023, [05 Jun 1869 - EGG FRUIT. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁶⁰ 'The Cultivation of the Egg Plant,' *Weekly Times* (Melbourne) , 21 November 1874, p.6, accessed at Trove 26 January 2023, [21 Nov 1874 - THE CULTIVATION OF THE EGG PLANT. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

Vegetable Entrée

The egg-plant fruit can be used for this purpose. (Follows a recipe for stuffed eggplant which can be found in the Addendum) ... Vegetable marrows may be treated in the same way, and they can both be served with tomato sauce if preferred. Tomatoes may be stuffed, stewed, or cooked au gratin, and in all these forms they make very nice entrees.⁶¹

Hall, cited above, said the eggplant was a tolerable substitute when turnips, pumpkins, or vegetable marrow could not be found.

Recipes published for the eggplant in the following years in newspapers and magazines trod the same path. Sliced and fried with or without crumbing or batter: (1895), Eggplant Olio (1899), Brinjal Fritters (1903), Fried Brinjal (1903), Egg Fruit Bringales to Fry (1915). Stuffed with or without minced meat: Vegetable Entrée (1878), Egg-Plant or Brinjal Cutlets (1903), Stuffed Egg Plant (1) (1904), Cooking Brinjals or Egg Fruit (1918), Stuffed Eggplant (2) (1919), A Tasty Hint (1922). Squash, Eggplant or Carrots en Casserole (1918) was an exception. As was Brinjal on Egg Fruit Pie (1926) – being sweet it was a complete break from other eggplant dishes. (See Addendum for all recipes.)

To give him credit, Hall balanced his settler recipe with an Indian one. In later years more examples of the use of the eggplant in India were published, albeit they were not formal recipes.

These fruits are much used in Spain, in America, and especially in Bengal, where they are looked upon almost as a necessity. They are generally held in connection with other dishes as a flavouring, as, for instance, in curry, but sometimes they are stuffed with forcemeat, &c.⁶²

The natives of India have various ways of cooking the egg-plant: — (a). In curries. (b) Roasted in hot ashes, and mashed with salt, onions, chillies, and lime-juice (or mustard-oil)⁶³, (c) Cut into slices, and fried in oil, (d) Pickled young and tender, with mustard-oil, chillies, and salt.⁶⁴

The only published recipe I have found in the period 1827 – 1925 that claims itself as Indian, apart from Hall's above, is one for Cooking Brinjals or Egg Fruit published 1918. The recipe is another variation on stuffed eggplant, here fried and not baked.⁶⁵ (See the Addendum for the recipe.)

Those with an interest in cooking the eggplant were also presented with descriptions of eggplant dishes from France and Italy.

A common method of cooking them as practised in France and Italy, is to cut them into slices ½ in. thick, and then soaking them for a few hours in salt water to remove any bitter taste. They are then squeezed, to press out as much of the juice as possible, parboiled, and fried with oil or

⁶¹ Vegetable Entrée; Household Hints, *The Week* (Brisbane), 2 January 1878, p.27, accessed at Trove 1 January 2023, [12 Jan 1878 - HOUSEHOLD HINTS. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁶² 'Rambles Around the Gardens, by a Suburban Resident'. *Adelaide Observer* (Adelaide), 25 May 1878, p.5, accessed at Trove 22 December 2022, [25 May 1878 - RAMBLES AMONG THE GARDENS. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁶³ This is basically a baji (bartha) described in Achaya, K.L.Y., *A Historical Dictionary of India Food*, Oxford University Press, 1998, p.31

⁶⁴ 'Aubergine or Egg-plant', *Australian Town and Country Journal* (Sydney), 18 April 1917, p.3 accessed at Trove 28 December 2022, [18 Apr 1917 - Aubergine or Egg-Plant. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁶⁵ 'Cooking Brinjals or Egg Fruit', *The Mail* (Adelaide), 13 November 1918, p.14, accessed at Trove 4 February 2023, [30 Nov marr - COOKING BRINJALS OR EGG FRUIT. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

butter, or butter mixed with grated bread crumbs, seasoning according to taste with pepper, salt, and chopped herbs.⁶⁶

A common mode of cooking in Italy and France is to half-boil. The interior is then scooped out, and mashed with pepper, salt, and butter — then replaced and baked.⁶⁷

There were no other recipes published between 1827 - 1925 that stated or implied that they were of Italian or French lineage, however.

The evident community interest in eggplant recipes in the 1870s and 1880s may be due to their absence in published cookery books in Australia until the 1890s.

The earliest published recipe for eggplant in a cookery book in Australia I have found to date is in Mrs. Lance Rawson's 1894 book *Australian Enquiry Book of Household and General Information*. 'To Cook Egg Plant' was a recipe for crumbed, fried slices of eggplant.⁶⁸ (See the Addendum for the full recipe)

The next published recipe was from Harriet Wicken in her 1897 book *Australian Table Dainties and Appetising Dishes*. The egg fruit, Wicken said was a fruit 'not very well known, but it is very delicious and wholesome'.⁶⁹ She suggested eggplant boiled and eaten like an egg and eggplant fritters. (See the recipe in the Addendum.) Curiously Wicken does not include a recipe for eggplant in her 1888 localised edition of her English publication, *The Kingswood Cookery Book*⁷⁰ nor among the recipes she contributed to Phillip Muskett's 1893 book *The Art of Living in Australia*.⁷¹ She does, however, have an extended description of how to cook egg plant in the fourth (1898) and later editions of *The Kingswood Cookery Book* and gives a recipe for stuffed eggplant and another for fried egg plant. She comments that 'The possibilities of egg plant are little understood. As it is generally cooked and served, that is, fried and reeking with fat, it is no wonder that it does not captivate the palates of those hygienically disposed'.⁷² (See Addendum for recipes from these books.)

Hannah Maclurcan included eggplants in her 1899 cookery book *Mrs Maclurcan's Cookery Book. A collection of practical recipes specially suited for Australia*.⁷³ Maclurcan also commented on the lack of knowledge of the eggplant saying: 'The bringhall is one of the most delicious vegetables we have, but it is seldom used'. (See Addendum for the recipes from this book.)

Again the methods in all these recipes, with a couple of exceptions, are standard practices for treating other vegetables and not created specifically for the eggplant. This is emphasised by recipes

⁶⁶ 'The Cultivation of the Eggplant', *Weekly Times* (Melbourne), 21 November 1874, p.6, accessed 26 January 2023, [21 Nov 1874 - THE CULTIVATION OF THE EGG PLANT. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁶⁷ 'Aubergine or Egg-plant', *Australian Town and Country Journal* (Sydney), 18 April 1917, p.3, accessed at Trove 28 December 2022, [18 Apr 1917 - Aubergine or Egg-Plant. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁶⁸ Rawson, Mrs, Lance (Mina), *Australian Enquiry Book of Household and General Information*, 1894 p. 47 accessed at Index: Australian enquiry book of household and general information.djvu - Wikisource, the free online library 30 December 2022

⁶⁹ Wicken, Harriet, *Australian Table Dainties and Appetising Dishes*, Ward, Lock & Co., 1897 p.27

⁷⁰ Wicken, H.F., *The Kingswood Cookery Book*, George Robertson and Company, Melbourne and Sydney, 1888.

⁷¹ Muskett, Philip E., *The Art of Living in Australia*, Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1893

⁷² Wicken, H.F., *The Kingswood Cookery Book*, George Robertson and Company, Melbourne and Sydney, Sixth Edition Review completing the 30th Thousand (19?)

⁷³ Maclurcan, Hannah, *Mrs Maclurcan's Cookery Book. A collection of practical recipes specially suited for Australia*, George Robertson and Co, Melbourne, 1899 p.183

in the books for cooking other vegetables in the same way as for eggplant, usually recipes for tomatoes and vegetable marrow (courgette or zucchini).

Out of 13 Australian cookbooks with wide circulation during 1900 – 1925 three had recipes for the eggplant with a total of six recipes among them.⁷⁴

The Lady Victorian Buxton Girl's Club has two recipes for egg-plants – also called bringales here – in their 1911 *Kookaburra Cookery Book: Egg Plant Fritters and Egg Fruit (Bringales) to Fry*.⁷⁵ This is a contributory cookbook, that is, it's a compilation of recipes from members of a club or group and not authored by a single professional person. That there are two recipes for egg plant/eggfruit/bringales suggest that some home cooks were actually experimenting with eggplants themselves. It's also unusual in that the 1911 edition in the front unnumbered page has an advertisement for E and W Hackett, Seedsman of 73 Rundle Street, who are selling seeds of the Eggplant or Brinjal - Long Purple, Black Pekin, New York Giant and Earliest Delicacy.

Annie J. King gave two recipes one simply titled Egg Pant which was basically a recipe for frying them, the other recipe being Eggplant Pancakes in her 1918 *Carry On Cookery Book*.⁷⁶ The Schauers gave two recipes in their 1923 *The Schauer Improved cookery book* - Grilled Bringhall (Egg Fruit) and Fried Egg Plant.⁷⁷

The eggplant: Not just ornamental

This article has tracked the eggplant in settler Australia over 100 years from 1827 – 1917.

First mentioned in 1827 in a list of esculents (fit to be eaten) cultivated by the Colonial Botanist Charles Fraser in the Botanic Gardens (Sydney) by 1844 it was appearing regularly in gardening calendars alongside more common culinary vegetables. At the same time the eggplant was being exhibited at horticultural and agricultural shows for its visual attractiveness.

While letter writer Melmoth Hall did not 'consider the (eggplant) worth cultivating in this country as an esculent'⁷⁸ his was a lone voice. Others found the eggplant 'an excellent summer vegetable'⁷⁹, 'a most delicious marrow vegetable'⁸⁰ and 'of considerable excellence'.⁸¹

⁷⁴ Cookbooks 1890 – 1925 without eggplant recipes surveyed for this article: Cookery book of good and tried receipts compiled for the Women's Missionary Association sale and exhibition, Sydney, September, 1895; Mrs. Forster Rutledge, *The Goulburn Cookery Book*, 1899; *Home cookery for Australia*, compiled and issued by the Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union of Victoria. 2nd. enlarged edition, 1906; A. and M. Schauer, *The Schauer Cookery book*, 1909; P.W.M.U. cookery book of Victoria, Compiled and issued by the Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union of Victoria, 1916; Flora Pell, *Our cookery book*, 1916; *Barossa cookery book : 400 selected recipes*, Tanunda Australia Day Celebrations Committee, 1917; *Cookery book of good and tried receipts*, compiled for the Women's Missionary Association of the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales, 1918; Gilmore, Dame Mary, *The worker cook book: compiled from the tried recipes of thrifty housekeepers sent from all parts of Australia to The worker's woman's page* 1919; *Green and gold cookery book : containing many good and proved recipes*, issued by Combined Congregational and Baptist Churches of South Australia in aid of King's College Fund. 2nd ed. rev. and with supplement, 1925.

⁷⁵ The Lady Victoria Buxton Girls' Club Adelaide, *The Kookaburra Cookery Book*, E.W. Cole, Melbourne, 1915, pp. 87, 88

⁷⁶ King, Annie J, "*Carry On*" *Cookery Book*, 1918, p.35

⁷⁷ *The Schauer Improved Cookery Book*, A. and M. Schauer, Edwards, Dunlop & Co. Limited, 1923, p.540

⁷⁸ 'Eggplant', *The Australasian* (Melbourne), 23 September 1865, p.9, accessed at Trove 28 December 2022, [23 Sep 1865 - Egg-plant. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁷⁹ Fraser, Charles Esq, Colonial Botanist, 'Memoranda of Australian Fruit and Vegetables', *Australian Almanack for the year of our lord 1831* p.155, Edited, Printed and published by Ralph Mansfield, Gazette Office accessed at Trove 2 January 2023, [\(1831\) \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

There was a consistent theme in articles about the eggplant over the period reviewed that Australians didn't know the culinary uses of the eggplant. I have argued that this lack of knowledge is only true for settler Australians and not all of them at that.

Descriptions of how to cook the eggplant appeared first in 1865 in a newspaper response to an inquiry as to how to use the eggplant. The response to the letter and all subsequent published recipes show that the eggplant got its place at the settler table though being adopted into common ways of cooking in settler cuisine.

Addendum. Recipes cited in this article

Vegetable Entrée (1878)

The egg-plant fruit can be used for this purpose. Boil until tender, halve it lengthwise, and scoop out the inside, leaving about half an inch thick. Take a small quantity of meat or poultry previously cooked, and well freed from fat, skin, and gristle; mince it finely, and then pound it quite smooth with the pulp of the vegetable, adding sweet herbs, chopped mushrooms, or any flavouring preferred; season with pepper and salt, and toss it for a few minutes in a sauce pan with a little butter, and a little stock to moisten it if necessary. Fill up the cavities of the egg-plant fruit with this mixture, add a layer of fried breadcrumbs, pour over some liquified butter, and bake in the oven for a few minutes. Vegetable marrows may be treated in the same way, and they can both be served with tomato sauce if preferred. Tomatoes may be stuffed, stewed, or cooked au gratin, and in all these forms they make very nice entrees.⁸²

To Cook Egg Plant (Rawson 1894)

Cut the egg plant in slices over night, and soak in weak salt and water. Before cooking dry on a cloth and then dip each slice in egg, roll in breadcrumbs, and fry in hot dripping or butter very slowly, as the plant requires to be well cooked. When a nice brown, serve as hot as possible.⁸³

Egg Fruit (Wicken 1897)

This fruit is not very well known, but it is very delicious and wholesome. It may be boiled till soft and eaten as an egg, cut in slices and fried or sliced up, dipped in batter and fried in the same way as other fruit fritters.⁸⁴

Bringhalls (Maclurcan 1899)

442 Bringhall (sic) (or Egg Fruit)

The bringhall is one of the most delicious vegetables we have, but it is seldom used; it makes a splendid breakfast dish sliced and grilled.

⁸⁰ 'Aubergines of Egg Fruits', *Adelaide Observer* (South Australia), 25 June 1887, p.10 accessed at Trove 23 December 2022, [25 Jun 1887 - AUBERGINES, OR EGG-FRUITS. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁸¹ 'A neglected vegetable,' *The Armidale Chronicle* (New South Wales), 1 July 1899, p.5 accessed at Trove 2 January 2023, [01 Jul 1899 - A NEGLECTED VEGETABLE. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#).

⁸² Vegetable Entrée; Household Hints, *The Week* (Brisbane), 2 January 1878, p.27, accessed at Trove 1 January 2023, [12 Jan 1878 - HOUSEHOLD HINTS. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁸³ Rawson, Mrs, Lance (Mina), *Australian Enquiry Book of Household and General Information*, 1894 p. 47 accessed at [Index: Australian enquiry book of household and general information.divu - Wikisource, the free online library](#) 30 December 2022

⁸⁴ Wicken, *Harriet Australian Table Dainties and Appetising Dishes*, Ward, Lock & Co., 1897 p.27

Slice it about half an inch in thickness, place on a grill over a clear fire; when nicely browned lay it on hot pieces of buttered toast and sprinkle with; pepper and salt.

443 Baked Bringhall

Bake a bringhall exactly as you do a potato, and serve with roast meat of any kind.

444 Bringhalls Stuffed

Bringhalls

Cold beef

Onion

Batter

Salt and Pepper

Mode – Scoop out the centre of a bringhall, mince the beef and a little onion, season well with pepper and salt, stuff the bringhall with it; place a piece of butter on the top of each one and bake for twenty minutes or half an hour.⁸⁵

Eggplant Olio (1899)

Egg plant olio is a very nice combination now in season. Slice and fry crisply brown one good sized eggplant. During the frying have three tomatoes, cut in halves, baking in the oven, pulp side uppermost; spread lavishly with butter, each dusted with a saltspoonful of salt and dash of pepper, and piled high with finely chopped onion. Serve one on each slice of eggplant.⁸⁶

Fried Egg Plant (Wicken 19-)

Wipe with a damp cloth; cut into sliced half an inch thick; let lie half an hour in strong brine; remove the moisture by placing the slices in a soft towel dip in beaten yolk of egg, then in bread crumbs, and fry in very hot fat of sufficient depth to immerse the slices.⁸⁷

Stuffed Egg Plant (Wicken 19?)

Cut the plant in two longitudinally and boil in salt water until tender; lift out; lay on a sieve and remove the insides, rejecting the seeds, which are slightly bitter, and be careful not to break the skin; chop or mash fine and mix with half a cup of fine fresh crumbs, butter, pepper, and salt to taste; fill the shells with this, piling it up in the centre; cover thickly with crumbs; dot with butter and bake a light brown. It is delicious with roast beef or lamb. If a more elaborate dish is desired, mince fine an ounce of salt pork; fry it a light brown; cook in this fat two sliced onions, and mix the crumbs and mashed egg plant with both. Field mushrooms stewed, seasoned, and minced, are also a delicious addition to the stuffing.⁸⁸

Broiled small egg plants (Wicken 19?)

Cut in two, make slight incisions on the outside, season with salt and pepper, baste with melted butter, and broil until soft, on a double gridiron; dish with the inside uppermost, and pour melted

⁸⁵ Maclurcan, Hannah, *Mrs Maclurcan's Cookery Book. A collection of practical recipes specially suited for Australia*, George Robertson and Co, Melbourne, 1899 p.83

⁸⁶ 'Recipes' *Australian Town and Country Journal* (Sydney), 23 December 1899, p.27, accessed at Trove 1 January 2023, [23 Dec 1899 - Recipes. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](https://trove.nla.gov.au)

⁸⁷ Wicken, H.F., *The Kingswood Cookery Book*, George Robertson and Company, Melbourne and Sydney, Sixth Edition Revised Completing the 30th Thousand (19?) p.342

⁸⁸ Wicken, H.F., *The Kingswood Cookery Book*, George Robertson and Company, Melbourne and Sydney, Sixth Edition Revised Completing the 30th Thousand (19?) p.342

butter over; then strew with shredded anchovies, parsley, and lemon juice and serve with tomato sauce.⁸⁹

(1903)

Bringal Fritters

Parboil the bringals in salt and water, and when cold cut into pieces about two inches long and a quarter of an inch thick; dip the pieces in a nice thick batter, and fry a crisp golden brown in abundance of boiling lard or dripping; dust a little salt over them, and serve with Dutch sauce, made as follows: Melt some butter in a saucepan, flavour with a little pepper and salt, and lemon juice.

Egg-Plant or Bringal Cutlets (1903)

Parboil the required number of bringals, cut them in halves (lengthways), scoop out the inside, and mix with it any nice forcemeat; butter the cases, and re-fill them with the mixture. Spread over the surface of each some well-beaten egg, and then cover thickly with fine breadcrumbs seasoned with pepper, salt, some finely-minced parsley, and sweet herbs. Bake till a nice rich brown, and serve.

Fried Bringal (1903)

Cut the bringals into very fine slices, and fry till nice and crisp.

Sprinkle with pepper and salt, and serve on a hot plate. — 'Indiana'.⁹⁰

Stuffed Egg Plant (1) (1904)

Remove hull from the vegetable; wash and wrap in cheese-cloth; plunge in boiling water to cook for half an hour; then remove inner pulp; chop fine; add one teaspoon salt, one tablespoon chopped onion, one tablespoon green pepper minced, seeds rejected; one cup minced cooked veal, one tablespoon butter; refill shell; bake in a quick oven half an hour; serve with raw tomatoes.⁹¹

The Kookaburra Cookbook (1915)

Egg Plant Fritters

Pare and split open the egg plants, boil until tender, remove as many seeds as possible, mix with two tablespoons of flour, an egg, salt and pepper, drop in spoonfuls into boiling fat, fry brown. Serve with tomato sauce.

Egg Fruit Bringales to Fry

Ingredients required – Egg fruit, salt and water, boiling lard (or butter), a beaten egg, bread (or plain biscuit) crumbs.

Pare the egg-fruit carefully, and cut into lengthwise slices half an inch thick, lay the slices in salt, add water sufficiently deep to cover them for an hour or two. Wipe each slice when taken out of the brine, dip in beaten egg, then in very fine bread (or what is better, unsweetened biscuit) crumbs. When thoroughly moistened with egg and coated with crumbs, fry in boiling lard until well done and nicely browned, Drain well and serve.

Miss Bunday Zephyrside⁹²

⁸⁹ Wicken, H.F., *The Kingswood Cookery Book*, George Robertson and Company, Melbourne and Sydney, Sixth Edition Revised Completing the 30th Thousand (19?) p.342

⁹⁰ 'Fried Bringal, Information Supplied', *Sunday Times* (Sydney), 1 November 1903 p.7 accessed at Trove 28 December 2022, [01 Nov 1903 - INFORMATION SUPPLIED. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](https://trove.nla.gov.au)

⁹¹ 'Stuffed-plant', *The Queenslander* (Brisbane), 20 February 1904, p.4, accessed at Trove 28 December, 2022 [20 Feb 1904 - Stuffed Egg-plant. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](https://trove.nla.gov.au)

⁹² The Lady Victoria Buxton Girls' Club Adelaide, *The Kookaburra Cookery Book*, South Australia, E.W. Cole, 1915, p. 88

Fried Egg Plant

Cut in slices, sprinkle with pepper salt, fry in butter till tender.⁹⁸

A Tasty Hint (1922)

Boil aubergines (egg-plant) till tender. Halve them lengthwise and do not break the skin. Pass the pulp through a fine sieve, season to taste with salt and pepper and stir in a little melted butter. Replace in the skins, sprinkle lightly with breadcrumbs and a few bits of butter and bake in a moderate oven until nicely browned.⁹⁹

The Egg Plant (1925)

A vegetable that is becoming very popular is the egg plant. Seeds may be sown in beds or boxes in a warm situation. When the plants are 3 inches high, set out in rich soil in rows 3 feet apart with a 2 feet separating the rows. When they start to grow in earnest, pinch out the tips. Feed with liquid manure. A healthy plant can bear up to a dozen fruit. Sow early in November.

For cooking, slice and soak in salt water for four hours; the dip each slice in batter and fry till a rich-brown colour. Served with other vegetables and meat, also with fish and poultry, the egg fruit is delicious.

Veronica¹⁰⁰

Brinjal on Egg Fruit Pie (1926)

Take one cupful of boiled egg fruit, half cupful brown sugar or golden syrup, half cupful of flour, one dessertspoonful of ground ginger, two eggs, one teaspoonful ground spice. Mix egg fruit, sugar, flour, spice and ginger well, beat eggs in with a little milk, line a pie dish with short pastry, pour in and bake for 35 minutes in a fairly hot oven.—Mrs. C.C. Hogg, Selby-street, Northam.¹⁰¹

(Mrs. C.C. Hogg won an Honourable Mention in the Recipe Contest of the *Sunday Times* for this.)

Acknowledgement

My thanks to Jacqui Newling and Alison Vincent for their assistance with researching this article and for critically reading an early draft. My thanks to Jean Duruz who also critically read the early draft..

⁹⁸ *The Schauer Improved Cookery Book*, A. and M, Schauer, Edwards, Dunlop & Co. Limited, 1923, p.540

⁹⁹ 'A Tasty Hint', *Evening News* (Sydney), 19 May 1922, p.9, accessed at Trove 28 December 2022, [19 May 1922 - A Tasty Hint - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

¹⁰⁰ 'The Egg Plant', For the Woman Gardener, *The Australian Woman's Mirror*, Vol 1 No 50 3 November 1925 p. 36 accessed at Trove 29 December 2022, [Vol. 1 No. 50 \(3 November 1925\) \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

¹⁰¹ 'Brinjal on Egg Fruit Pie' Honorable Mention. Recipe Contest, *Sunday Times* (Perth), 20 June 1926, p.4, accessed at YTrove 3 February 2023, [20 Jun 1926 - Honorable Mention. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)