



## Trombette and Melanzane

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*Rick Gush*

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The most spectacular vegetables have to be the trombette squash. I grow these squash on overhead trellises so that the young squash can hang down as they grow. This produces straighter fruits because if the young squash encounter any resistance while they are growing, they grow in a twisted curve. My wife and my mother-in-law both prefer straight trombette, so I try to accommodate them.

Trombette are eaten like zucchini, and the most desirable fruits are the young ones. The fruits grow quickly, and it takes only two days to go from the flower opening to the fruit being ready to harvest.

Trombette also can be used as a winter squash, in which case the fruits are allowed to grow to full size, which is about four feet long. I always harvest most of the fruits when they are young, and two or three trombette to grow to maturity. The first photo shows a young fruit ready to harvest on the left and a mature fruit on the right.

Every region of Italy has their own particular squash favorites, so as nifty as trombette squash are, they are still mostly grown in Liguria. The vegetable markets in Milan or Rome are much less likely to offer trombette but here in Rapallo almost every vendor offers them.

Another local Ligurian favorite are the small round eggplants, aka melanzane. These fruits shown in the second photo are an ancient Genovese variety, and are mentioned in records from six hundred years ago.

These small eggplants can be steamed or used in soups or gazpacho mixes and can in a pinch be used for eggplant parmesan. But the classic Genovese recipe is to stuff them with a mildly cheesy filling. After cooking the little eggplants are about the size of a flattened ping pong ball, but they are delicious.

They are sort of a bother to prepare, but there are more than a dozen places in Rapallo where pre-cooked Genovese stuffed melanzane are sold alongside several other types of stuffed vegetables. There's a pretty active market in these re-heatable stuffed vegetables, and they function sort of like TV dinners do for Americans.

One of the things I like about growing melanzane is that even though they are tomato cousins, they don't seem to be nearly as susceptible to disease problems here.

Some years the plants produce less abundantly than others, but so far I've not had a single notable pest problem. Sometimes the fruits don't become dark purple, but instead remain a sort of violet grey, but even the grey fruits are tasty. In any case, the small purple eggplant flowers are always attractive.

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