

# Cucumber *Cucumis sativus*

A sweet juicy garden cucumber does not have the unappetizing waxy shine that coats store-bought fruits, and can be enjoyed out-of-hand. Make sure your cucs are sweet and not bitter by providing them with plenty of water in the heat of summer.

**TIP** – Cucumbers referred to as "burpless" contain very little of the compound that causes bitterness. Burpless varieties are long and slim, and nearly seedless.

**Location and soil** Plant cucumbers in full sun. Many varieties ramble, so if you have limited space look for a bush type, or construct a trellis for plants to climb on. Cucumbers produce best in loose, fertile, well-drained soil.

**When to Plant** Sow seeds directly into the garden after danger of frost; soil should be 60° or warmer. You can also start seeds indoors about 3 weeks before you plan to set them out. If your growing season is sufficiently long, start a second crop about a month after the first.

**Seed depth and Spacing** If direct-seeding, sow seeds 2 to 3 inches apart and 1 inch deep in hills spaced 3 to 5 feet apart, or plant in rows. If you plan to grow vertically, set up trellises at the time of seeding.

**Germination** Seed should germinate in less than a week in warm soil, but can take up to 2 weeks if soil is cold.

**Thinning** Thin seedlings when they have 2-3 true leaves, leaving 2 or 3 plants per hill. If planting in a row, thin to 12 inches apart.

**Care** Cucumbers are more than 90 percent water, and can take on a bitter taste if subjected to drought stress. Set up a soaker hose and make sure they get 1-2 inches of water each week.

**Pests** Cucumber beetles can kill young seedlings, but even worse, they can spread bacterial wilt, which can destroy the vines later in the season. Protect young vines with row covers, and inspect your mature plants daily, handpicking and crushing the pests.

**Fertilize** Add a generous amount of compost to the soil prior to planting, and side-dress with compost or a balanced fertilizer when the first flowers appear.

**Harvest** Cucumbers can be harvested anytime after the flower drops off of the fruit. Picklers should be picked small; slicers are best when harvested at 6-8 inches. Some European and Asian varieties retain their mild flavor at 12 inches or more. Harvest often to encourage more fruit development.

**Nutrition** Although less nutritious than most vegetables, cucumbers with their skins are a good source of vitamins C and K, and the minerals molybdenum and potassium.

## Pollinators Required ... or not

Cucumbers not only come in all shapes and sizes, from petite and ball-like to long and slender, they also have particular pollination requirements. Standard cucs produce male and female flowers, and depend on insects for fruit set. Gynoecious varieties bear female flowers only, and require a pollinator plant. A third type, called parthenocarpic, needs no pollination at all and bears seedless fruits. Parthenocarpic cucumbers were bred for greenhouses; some will produce distorted fruit if pollinated by insects.

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	<b>Armenian (snake cucumber)</b>	<b>Straight 8 AAS Winner, 1935</b>	<b>National Pickling</b>	<b>Spacemaster 80</b>	<b>Suyo Long</b>
					
<b>Description</b>	Thin-skinned and mild flavored, the light green fruits of this heirloom variety can grow to 3 feet in length, and have a tendency to twist and turn.	This open-pollinated variety produces heavy yields of perfectly straight, dark green fruits with pure white flesh. Excellent flavor.	Developed by the National Pickle Packers Association in 1924 for high yields, this vigorous pickler has a long harvest season. Open-pollinated.	Compact, short-vined plants grow to 24 inches tall and wide, and produce heavy yields of dark green fruits.	Heirloom Asian-type cucumber produces long, ribbed, “burpless” fruits with a mild flavor and crisp texture. Nearly seedless.
<b>Fruit Size and Shape</b>	Best when harvested at 12-18 inches and under 2½ inches diameter	Very uniform 8-inch long fruits, straight and smooth-skinned.	Short and stout. Pick at 2-3 inches for gherkins, or 5-6 inches for larger pickles or slicing.	Best when harvested at 6-8 inches long.	Best when harvested at about 15 inches
<b>Culture</b>	Vines grow to 3 feet. Water frequently, and train on a trellis for long, straight fruits.	Water frequently. Give vines plenty of room to spread on the ground, or train on a trellis.	Water frequently. Give the mid-sized, vigorous vines room to spread, or train on a trellis.	Water frequently. This bush variety is suitable for small gardens, or for container growing.	Water frequently. Trellising prevents fruit ends from curling.
<b>Uses</b>	Slicing; not good for pickling	Slicing	Pickling or slicing	Slicing	Slicing
<b>Days to Harvest</b>	760-70	58-65	52-58	60	60