

GROWING GUIDE FOR CUCUMBERS

Binomial Name:	Cucumis
Varieties:	Crystal Lemon, African Horned, Chinese Long Green, Melothria, Poona Kheera, Marketmore 76, Parisian Pickling, White Wonder
Start:	Seeds or seedlings
Germination:	3 to 10 days, 15°C to 35°C
Seed Life (viability):	5 years
Soil:	Well drained, high fertility
Sunlight:	Full sun, part shade
Sow Seeds:	5 cm apart
Transplant/Thin to:	20 cm apart
Ave. Days to Harvest:	50 to 65
Good Companions:	Beans, Beetroot, Cabbages, Celery, Dill, Fennel, Garlic, Lettuce, Onion, Peas, Sweetcorn, Yarrow
Bad Companions:	Kohlrabi, Potato

Sowing & Planting:

Cucumbers require well-drained, fertile soil, high in organic matter and with a near-neutral pH. Consistent and plentiful moisture is needed, especially when fruit is ripening.

Most cucumbers are vining varieties and can climb up to 2m with support, or hug the ground if allowed to sprawl.

Cucumbers are very sensitive to cold. They need warm soil and air, whether direct-seeded or transplanted. Don't rush to plant too early. Seed will not germinate if soil temperature is below 10 C and only germinates slowly at 18 C.

Direct-seed 2.5cm to 3cm deep, either in rows (5cm apart in rows 1.5 - 1.8m apart) or in hills (3 to 6 seeds per hill, hills spaced 90cm to 1.5m apart). Thin to 25 to 30cm apart in rows or 2 to 3 plants per hill. Snip off plants when thinning (rather than pulling the seedlings) to avoid disturbing the roots of nearby plants.

For early crops, use black plastic sheet mulch and row covers or other protection to speed warming and to protect plants. Direct seed into holes in the plastic. Cucumbers seeded into black plastic usually produce larger yields, as well earlier ones.

For extra early crops, start plants inside about 3 to 5 weeks before transplanting. Sow 3 seeds per pot in 10cm pots. Thin to one or two plants per pot. Grow above 21 C during the day and above 15 C at night. Be careful when hardening-off plants not to expose them to cold temperatures.

Plants with one or two true leaves transplant best. Transplant into black plastic mulch or warm garden soil after all danger of frost has passed and weather has settled. Be careful not to damage roots when transplanting. If using row covers, remove when the flowers begin to blossom to assure good pollination.

Growing:

For a continuous harvest, make successive plantings every 2 to 3 weeks until about 3 months before first frost date. About 1 month before first frost, start pinching off new flowers so that the plants channel all their energy into ripening the existing fruit.

To save space, train cucumbers up a trellis or a 'teepee' (make sure the trellised plants don't shade other sun-loving plants). This also increases air circulation (reducing disease problems), makes harvesting easier and produces straighter fruit. Set up the trellis before planting or transplanting to avoid root injury. Pinch back vines that extend beyond the trellis to encourage lateral growth.

Tip: Most cucumbers have both male and female flowers. The male flowers often blossom first, sometimes as much as two to three weeks before any female flowers start to appear. You will recognise the female flowers once they finally blossom, as they form on the ends of the immature fruits and, once pollinated, then fall off as the fruit develops.

Cucumbers are heavy feeders and require fertile soil, nitrogen rich fertilizer and/or additions of high-N organic matter sources. Pale, yellowish leaves indicate a nitrogen deficiency. Leaf bronzing is a sign of potassium deficiency.

To reduce pests and diseases, do not plant cucumbers where you have grown them in the previous two years. Choose resistant varieties to prevent many diseases and/or trellis vining varieties to encourage good air circulation.

Harvesting:

Generally, the time to harvest for cucumbers is approximately sixty to seventy days from planting to harvest. Cucumbers can be picked at anytime there is fruit, of course depending on the cucumber variety and the use of the fruit (pickling or salads etc). Cucumbers should be picked early in the morning and refrigerated immediately. The larger a cucumber gets, the more of its flavour is lost, becoming bitter and unpalatable. Cucumbers that have turned yellow are long past their peak.

Once the first cucumbers are ready to be harvested, cut the vine about 1cm above the fruit. Harvest all of the vegetables before maturity to ensure quality fruits and higher yields. If cucumbers are allowed to mature and turn yellow on the vine, the plant will stop producing. During harvest time, cucumbers should be picked at least every other day, with daily harvesting being ideal.

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