

# Cleveland Seed Bank's

guide to growing

## \*CUCUMBER\*

Native to India, *Cucumis sativus* has been an important food source to humans for over 3,000 years. Early cucumbers were likely bitter, because of compounds they contained called cucurbitacins that helped deter insects, but humans have since selected for more tasty varieties.

Although naturalized in many parts of the world, *Cucumis anguria* or 'gherkins' are indigenous only to Africa and are a close relative to the common cucumber.

The phrase "cool as a cucumber" embodies ancient folk knowledge confirmed by science in 1970: the inside of a field cucumber on a warm day is 20 degrees cooler than the air temperature!

**Latin name:** *Cucumis sativus* (common), *Cucumis anguria* (Jamaican Burr Gherkin), *Melothria scabra* (Mexican Gherkin or Cucamelon)

**Sun:** Full

**Life cycle:** Annual

**Direct sow or transplant:** Direct Sow

**Height:** 5' + depending on variety

**Container Friendly:** Yes



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## SOW



**Direct sow/transplant:** Cucumber does not like its roots disturbed so direct sowing is recommended.

**Common mistakes:** Sown too early, cuke seeds will rot in cold soils. Protect your young seedlings from cold spells. Thin seedlings to prevent overcrowding.

**Days to germination:** ~ 3-10 days, depending on temperature and weather.

**When:** Wait to sow cucumbers 1 week after final frost. If transplanting, plan to start seeds indoors 3 weeks before final frost and transplant outside once danger of frost has passed.

**Seedling Depth:** 1/4-1/2 inch deep.

**Spacing:** Sow 2 seeds (or 1 transplant) every 2 feet. Thin to the strongest seedling once true leaves emerge.

**Succession sowing:** Cucumber seeds can be succession sown ~3 weeks after the first planting and succession sown again ~6 weeks after the first planting.

**Companion planting:** Small radish varieties and baby greens will enjoy the shade provided by your cucumbers.

## GROW

**Soil:** Cucumbers thrive in rich, moist, well-draining soil. They prefer a pH between 6.0 and 6.8.

**Trellising** A trellis improves airflow, helping the plant resist disease. Utilize a 'hog fence' trellis to grow fruits straighter and contain the sprawl of vining varieties. You may need to coax young tendrils to wrap around the trellis.



**Containers:** Choose a 5+ gallon container for bush variety cucumbers. A trellis may be needed as vines from these more compact varieties can still grow upwards of 4 feet long.

**Pests:** Slugs and snails can damage young seedling growth. Also look for evidence of Cucumber Beetles. Row coverings can help!



**Diseases:** Downy and powdery mildew affects cucumber plants. Spacing and a good trellis system will increase airflow around leaves and fruits.

# HARVEST



Cucumbers are harvested in a wide range of maturity.

*The skin will toughen as the cucumber grows.*

**Slicing:** Slicer cukes can be harvested at your preference, but once the skin turns from green to yellow (with the exception of white/yellow cultivars) the taste will likely become unappealing.

**Pickling:** Most pickling cucumbers are picked while their skins are still thin, for a better flavor and texture when pickled.

**Squeeze Test:** When in doubt - give the cuke a light squeeze, the flesh should feel firm with no mushy spots.



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# SAVE

Cucumbers are insect-pollinated. Isolation may be needed to prevent cross-pollination.



**2** Slice overripe cucumbers in half lengthwise. Scoop the seeds into a container. Add water to double the volume.



**3** With your fingers, stir around the seeds. The goal is to separate the seeds from the gel-like material coated around the seed. Giving the container a hard shake may help.

**4** Rinse and dry viable seeds over a screen, out of direct sunlight. Seed viable for 5 years.

**Preserving the harvest:** Cucumbers are often eaten fresh, but there are other ways to preserve the harvest too.

Freeze slices for future use in cucumber-water infusions or smoothies.

Pickling is a classic method of preservation for cukes and it's super easy! Follow your favorite recipes for vinegar or lacto-fermented pickles. Different flavors make a savory or sweet pickle - feel free to experiment with the add-ins!

# TYPES

**Slicing:** Well-suited for sandwiches and salads, slicers produce the largest fruits with the thickest skins.

**Pickling:** While all cucumbers can be pickled, pickling types are more short and stout. Most pickling varieties are harvested before the cucumber reaches its true mature size for best flavor and texture.

**'Gherkins':** A different species of cucumber, these unique relatives come in a wide variety of shapes, colors, and sizes. Very versatile, they can be used like cucumbers or cooked like squash.

**Bush & Vine:** Most cucumber varieties grow 5' + vines that need to be trellised. Bush varieties, also called 'dwarf' varieties, produce 2-4' vines and are much more compact.



*Cucumis anguria*



*Cucumis sativus*



*Melothria scabra*



Lemon Cucumber