

Cucumber (*Cucumis sativus*)



Full Sun



Cucumbers

Owners of small gardens often have difficulty finding room for any of the vine crops because they need at least a 5 by 5-foot ground area. Because of their light weight, cucumbers adapt well to being trained up trellises, thereby saving space.

Plant them 18 inches apart, train the center stem vertically up the trellis to the top, then pinch the top off and train the side branches sideways. Otherwise, grow in the same way as you would pumpkins, squash, and melons.

Thanks to research and the development of new strains, cucumber growing has become increasingly popular with the commercial grower and home gardener alike. The new varieties are both drought and disease resistant, which takes the risk out of their cultivation.

Planting Cucumbers

When choosing a field for planting cucumbers, a flat, well-drained one is preferred to a slope. A level field will retain moisture longer during the hot, dry spells. If possible, it should be a clover or bean field that had been plowed under the previous fall or in early spring.

Soil requirements

Soil should be medium textured, neither too light and sandy, nor too heavy. The plants will grow rapidly in sandy soil but, unless irrigation is provided, they will dry up during the midsummer months. A heavy, wet soil, on the other hand, interferes with proper root development and leads to fungus and disease problems. Heavy soils also tend to produce later crops.

Nutrient requirements

Cucumbers are heavy users of organic materials and produce better and more heavily when organically fed. A balanced fertilizer should be used if the soil is deficient in the necessary elements. This should include a minimum of 5 percent nitrogen, and about 20 percent of such organic materials as ground-up cottonseed, dried blood, dehydrated manures, and bone and fish meal.

Planting

Cucumbers may be planted any time in May after danger of frost is past. About the middle of the month is best. Before plowing the field, scatter plenty of seasoned manure, aged at least four months so as not to burn the tender plants. This manure will serve two purposes in the soil: one, feeding the plants; two, helping retain moisture during the hot spells and keeping the soil porous. Adequate moisture in the soil at all times spells the difference between weak, unproductive plants, and green, robust ones.

Plant the seed just one inch below the surface to prevent damp rot in case of heavy rains. Most cucumber rows are planted six to seven feet apart running from east to west for maximum sun. If space permits, eight feet is better. This gives the vines more room to grow without getting matted,

and will make picking easier.

Space hills six feet apart in all directions. This allows for cross-cultivation which eliminates hand hoeing to keep down weeds. Plant six seeds to a mound and, when four inches high, thin out to three plants.

Start cultivating as soon as the plants are three inches high. One cultivation a week is necessary until the vines begin to creep. Since the cucumber plants grow so vigorously, the soil must be kept as loose as possible so as not to hamper their rapid growth.

When the vines have attained a length of about 18 inches, stop cultivating and apply a moderate amount of organic fertilizer along both sides of each row. A rock fertilizer, high in nitrogen, is excellent. If possible, apply during a light rain or drizzle so the water will immediately carry it down to the roots where it is needed. Then, to protect the shallow roots, mulch between and within the rows with a heavy layer of clean, dry straw, hay or sawdust.

An early cucumber crop can be grown by planting the seeds under hot caps as early as a month before normal planting. Be sure to remove the winter mulch and allow the sun to dry out the soil for a few days. Sow the seeds thickly after the ground has been heavily mulched.

Start picking cucumbers six to seven weeks after planting, or as soon as two or three are found in each clump of vines.

Harvesting Cucumbers

Six to seven weeks after planting, small cucumbers begin to form on the vines. They bear watching because they grow into full-sized cucumbers overnight. Start picking as soon as two or three are found in a clump of vines.

The first picking is usually small, but it is necessary in order to encourage the plants to produce more. For most pickles, cucumbers two to six inches long are used.

For salads and larger dill pickles, wait until they are six to ten inches long. Never let cucumbers ripen and rot on the vine.

Cucumber varieties

Burpee Hybrid is a disease-resistant variety with a 60-day maturing period. Gemini Hybrid (60 days) also has a resistance to mosaic and mildew. Poinsett is a heavy yielder, disease resistant and performs well in the South. Salty Hybrid is an early breed, maturing in only 50 days.

China Long cucumbers grow to a length of two feet if properly cared for, and grow best on a trellis. Wisconsin SMR-18 is great for pickling, as is Spartan Dawn Hybrid Pickier. Marketer and Burpeeana Hybrid are hardy varieties for the home grower.