



Cool Cucumber

by Bev Servadio, UC Master Gardener

Those few days of hot weather we recently experienced made me crave cucumbers. To me, they are the cooling, refreshing fruit I want on those hot, sweaty days. Tracing the history of cucumbers indicated that they are believed to have originated in India some 3000 years ago. I'm thankful they made the journey to my garden.

Research on cucumbers for this article revealed many cultivars and they are classified into three main varieties: "slicing", "pickling", and "burpless". Cucumbers grown to be eaten fresh are slicing cucumbers. Slicing cucumbers in the North American are usually longer, uniform in color, and have a tougher but smooth skin. Commercial pickles made from cucumbers specially bred for uniformity are called picklers, and grow to about 3 to 4" long and 1" wide. When compared to slicers, picklers tend to be shorter, thicker, less regularly shaped, and have bumpy skin. The burpless cucumbers have a thinner skin and are sweeter. They are said to be easy to digest and to have a pleasant taste. They can grow as long as 2 feet, are nearly seedless, and have a delicate skin. Most commonly grown in greenhouses, these cucumbers are often found in stores shrink-wrapped in plastic.

Cucumbers can be determinate – grow, bloom, set fruit and mature all at the same time, or indeterminate – grow, bloom, set fruit & mature continually throughout the growing season. There are long vine cultivars, and bush cultivars. Vining cucumbers grow long vines and are best grown on trellis. Bush cucumbers grow on short vines which mean the plants are compact. Bush cucumbers are great in containers. Our growing season is long enough to enjoy a second crop of some cultivars by planting another container/bed thirty days from your first planting. The size of the fruit varies with the cultivar, from 1½" up to 3' long! We grow vine and bush in our Square Foot Garden beds. Take your time in choosing a cucumber for your garden. Consider the variety, cultivar, and size. Also consider the taste of the fruit. Flavors range from mild to bitter and nutty to citrus to everything in between. Look for disease resistance and pest tolerant cultivars.

Cucumbers need rich, well-drained soil and a sunny location. Seeds germinate best at 85-90°F soil temperature and sprout in 5 to 10 days depending on the cultivar. Sow seeds ½" deep and 12" apart. Look for seeds at your local nurseries, big box stores and online. You can also find transplants at these same locations. Protect from hot sun until established.

We chose the following two cucumbers for our garden this season.



Bush Slicer Cucumber - This one is perfect for small space or Square Foot Gardening because of its compact growing habit. The fruits are 6 to 8 inches with smooth tender skin and small seed cavities. It is sweet and has crisp flesh. The Bush Slicer is indeterminate and yields a prolific crop in both cool conditions & real summer heat. It is great sliced, sprinkled with pinch of sea salt and a dash of vinegar. Days to maturity – 55.

Armenian Yard Long - Hands down our favorite “cucumber” - it is botanically classified as a melon. I use this one to make my special Bread & Butter spicy pickles. While it does grow to be 3 foot long, it usually is harvested earlier because we can’t wait for that great taste. It is also indeterminate and is a burpless variety. The Armenian should be grown on a trellis to keep the fruit off the ground, grow straighter, and make harvesting easier. Days to maturity – 55.



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