



## Ventura Garden to Table Series – Cucumbers

Cucumbers (*Cucumis sativus*) are in the *Cucurbitaceae* (gourd) family – along with melons and squash. They are widely grown in home gardens, thrive in full sun (minimum 6 hours), and produce abundantly in our climate. There are more than 100 varieties to choose from.

### Heirloom vs. Hybrid

- **Heirloom** – open-pollinated; seeds saved stay true to type. Unique flavors and shapes; fruit can vary in size – less uniform in yield and ripening time.
- **Hybrid** – cross-pollinated; seeds saved do not grow true to type. Bred for disease resistance, uniformity in appearance, and higher yields – generally more productive for home gardens.

### Cross-Pollination

- Only varieties of the **same species** can cross-pollinate with each other.
- Cucumbers and melons **will not** cross-pollinate with each other, even though they are in the same family.
- Different cucumber varieties **can** cross with each other – this only affects saved seeds, not the fruit you harvest this season.
- Most cucumbers have separate male and female flowers on the same plant; bees and other insects are needed for pollination.

### Cucumber Types and Varieties to Consider

Overview – cucumbers fall into three main categories: slicing (fresh eating), pickling, and specialty types.

- **Slicing Cucumbers** – bred for fresh eating; longer, smooth-skinned, mild flavor. Best harvested at 6–8 inches.
  - **Dasher II** – high yield, straight fruits to 8”; very reliable slicers for home gardens.
  - **Marketmore 76** – high yield, disease-resistant; a classic home garden variety.
  - **Slicemaster** – high yield, disease-resistant; uniform dark green fruits.
  - **Straight Eight** – classic heirloom variety; uniform shape and reliable production.
  - **Suyo Long** – Asian variety; heat-tolerant, ribbed skin, mild burpless flavor – excellent for Ventura’s warm summers.
  - **Armenian Cucumber** – technically a *melon* (*Cucumis melo*) but used as a cucumber; heat-tolerant, long season, very mild flavor – outstanding in our climate.
- **Pickling Cucumbers** – shorter and blockier than slicing varieties; thin skin and firm flesh hold brine well. Can also be eaten fresh.
  - **Boston Pickling** – heirloom; crisp texture and prolific production – a reliable choice.
  - **National Pickling** – short, blocky shape; firm texture holds brine exceptionally well.
  - **Parisian Gherkin** – small French variety; produces the classic tiny gherkin – harvest at 2–3 inches.
  - **Eureka** – hybrid; versatile for both pickling and fresh slicing; disease-resistant.
- **Specialty Cucumbers** – unusual shapes, flavors, or uses; fun to grow and often conversation starters at the table.
  - **Lemon Cucumber** – round, yellow, apple-sized; mild and slightly sweet flavor.
  - **Japanese Long** – burpless variety; long, slender, very mild – good for fresh eating.



- **Mexican Sour Gherkin (Cucamelon)** – grape-sized fruits that look like tiny watermelons; tangy, refreshing flavor; very productive vines.
- **English (European)** – long, straight, thin skin; sweet flavor with no bitterness.
- **Persian** – mild, sweet taste; crisp texture and thin, easy-to-eat skin; small and seedless – one of the most popular varieties in Southern California.

**Basic Care:** QR code will take you to the Soil to Sprouts slide deck on the Ventura County Master Gardener website.



- **Seeds or Transplant** – both work well; transplants give an earlier harvest. Direct sow when soil reaches 60°F+. Space plants 8–10 inches apart, or plant in hills of 2–3 seeds.
- **Mulch the Soil Surface** – apply a 3–4-inch layer of mulch to retain moisture and keep soil temperature stable.
- **Watering** – water deeply and consistently; keep soil evenly moist especially during flowering and fruit set. Overhead watering can promote disease, prefer drip irrigation.
- **Support** – cucumbers are natural climbers – a trellis, cage, or stake improves air circulation, reduces disease, makes harvesting easier, and saves space.
- **Fertilizer** – use a general purpose (10-10-10) fertilizer at planting. High nitrogen fertilizer encourages leafy growth at the expense of fruit – reduce nitrogen once vines begin flowering.
- **Raised Beds or Containers?** – cucumbers do well in large containers (5+ gallons per plant); bush varieties are best for containers. Use potting soil or a blend of compost/topsoil/vermiculite.

### When to Harvest:

- Generally ready **50–70 days** from transplanting, depending on variety.
- Harvest when fruits reach the **desired size for the variety** – most slicers at 6–8 inches, picklers at 2–4 inches, specialty types vary.
- Skin should be **firm and dark green**, not yellowing – yellow skin signals over-maturity; the fruit becomes bitter and watery.
- Harvest **every 1–2 days** at peak season – cucumbers grow fast and frequent picking encourages more production. Leaving overripe fruit on the vine slows production.

### Harvesting:

- Use a sharp knife or pruning shears to cut the stem – do not pull or twist, which can damage the vine.
- Harvest in the morning when cucumbers are at their crispest and coolest.
- Fresh cucumbers: store in the refrigerator at 50–55°F; use within 1 week. Do not store near apples, bananas, or melons – ethylene gas accelerates yellowing and decay.
- Cucumbers are **not suitable for long-term storage** – preserve by pickling or fermenting if you have a large harvest.

Learn more about Ventura County Master Gardener using  
this QR to visit the website.

