



**CORNELL  
COOPERATIVE  
EXTENSION OF  
ONEIDA COUNTY**

# HOME GROWN FACTS

121 Second Street Oriskany, NY 13424-9799  
(315) 736-3394 or (315) 337-2531 FAX: (315) 736-2580



## GROWING CUCUMBERS

Whether for pickling or slicing, cucumbers are easy to grow if you give them good soil, full sun and sufficient moisture, and wait for weather to warm before planting.

### Site Characteristics

#### Sunlight:

- full sun

#### Soil conditions:

- requires well-drained soil
- requires high fertility

Well-drained, fertile soil, high in organic matter with near-neutral pH. Consistent, plentiful moisture needed until fruit is ripening. May develop bitter taste in dry sites. Cucumbers are heavy nitrogen feeders and require fertile soil.

#### Special locations:

- outdoor containers - Use bush varieties and keep well watered.
- 

**Lifecycle:** annual

**Ease-of-care:** easy

Cucumbers are not hard to grow if you provide good soil, plenty of moisture and full sun, wait for soil and weather to warm before planting, and use fabric row covers if pests are a problem.

**Height:** 1 to 6 feet

Vining varieties can climb up to 6 feet with support, or hug the ground if allowed to sprawl.

**Spread:** 1 to 6 feet

Bush varieties take up only 2 or 3 square feet, while unsupported vining varieties can run along the ground for 6 or more feet.

#### Bloom time:

- mid-summer
- late summer
- early fall

**Flower color:** yellow

**Foliage color:** medium green

**Foliage texture:** medium

#### Shape:

- upright
- climbing / vine

**Shape in flower:** same as above

*Helping You Put Knowledge to Work*

## Growing Information

### How to plant:

Propagate by seed

Germination temperature: 60 F to 105 F - Do not plant until soil reaches 65 F.

Days to emergence: 3 to 10 - May germinate in 3 days at 80 F to 90 F. Germination may take 10 days or longer at cooler temperatures.

### Maintenance and care:

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 50 F, and germinates only slowly at 68 F.

Direct-seed 1 to 1 ½ inches deep, either in rows (2 inches apart in rows 5 to 6 feet apart) or in hills (3 to 6 seeds per hill, hills spaced 3 to 5 feet apart).

Thin to 8 to 15 inches apart in rows or 2 to 3 plants per hill. Snip off plants when thinning to avoid disturbing the roots of nearby plants.

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

For extra early crops, start plants inside 3 to 5 weeks before transplanting. Sow 3 seeds per pot in 2-inch pots. Thin to one or two plants per pot. Grow above 70 F during the day and above 60 F 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 danger of frost has passed and weather has settled. Be careful not to damage roots when transplanting. If using peat pots, make sure they are saturated before transplanting and completely buried. If using row covers, remove when flowers begin to blossom to assure good pollination.

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

To save space, train vining cucumbers to a trellis. (Make sure the trellised plants don't shade other sun-loving plants.) This also increases air circulation (reducing disease problems), makes harvest easier and produces straighter fruit. Set up trellis before planting or transplanting to avoid root injury. Space plants about 10 inches apart. Pinch back vines that extend beyond the trellis to encourage lateral growth.

Most cucumbers have both male and female flowers. The male flowers blossom first and produce pollen, but no fruit. Other varieties produce female flowers predominately or exclusively. Seed packs of these varieties include a few seeds (usually marked with dye) of another variety that produces male flowers to provide pollen. Make sure you don't remove pollinator plants when thinning.

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

To reduce pest and disease pressure, do not plant cucumbers where you've grown them in the last two years. Choose resistant varieties to prevent many diseases and/or trellis vining varieties to encourage good air circulation.

**Pests:**

Stripped or spotted cucumber beetles - Construct tents of fine netting or cheesecloth or use floating row cover over young transplants and seedlings. Put in place at planting and remove before temperatures get too hot in midsummer. Control of beetles is important to prevent bacterial wilt in cucumbers but less important in other vine crops.

Aphids - A hard stream of water can be used to remove aphids from plants. Wash off with water occasionally as needed early in the day. Check for evidence of natural enemies such as gray-brown or bloated parasitized aphids and the presence of alligator-like larvae of lady beetles and lacewings.

Squash vine borer - Remove borers by hand and destroy. Destroy crop residues after harvest.

**Diseases:**

Bacterial wilt (*Erwinia tracheiphila*) - Remove and discard or destroy infested plants. Control cucumber beetles that spread the bacteria. (See striped or spotted cucumber beetles.) Control as soon as they appear. Some varieties are less susceptible to bacterial wilt but may not be readily available.

Powdery mildew - Avoid crowding plants. Space apart to allow air circulation. Eliminate weeds around plants and garden area to improve air circulation. In autumn, rake and dispose of all fallen or diseased leaves and fruit. Plant resistant varieties such as Marketmore 76, Slicemaster and Raider.

Scab - Avoid wetting foliage if possible. Water early in the day so aboveground plant parts will dry as quickly as possible. Avoid crowding plants. Space apart to allow air circulation.

Cucumber mosaic virus - Remove and discard or destroy infested plants. Plant resistant varieties such as Pacer, Marketmore 76, Dasher II, Slicemaster, Spacemaster and Sweet Success. Manage aphids that spread virus. Eliminate perennial weeds such as milkweed, marshcress and yellow rocket; and avoid planting next to susceptible ornamentals.

Other diseases:

Anthracnose

Leaf spot

**Varieties**

When choosing cucumber varieties, keep in mind:

**Pickling varieties** bear short fruit (usually 3 to 4 inches) with thin skins and spines, usually with a stippled color pattern ranging from dark green at the stem to light green at the blossom end. They are usually ready to harvest sooner than slicing varieties, but harvest only lasts about 7 to 10 days.

**Slicing varieties** have longer fruit (usually 7 to 8 inches) with a thick skin. Their coloring is sometimes stippled but is usually a uniform dark green. They usually start to bear a week or so later than pickling varieties, but harvest may continue for 4 to 6 weeks.

**Vining varieties** produce more fruit than bush varieties, but they take up much more space.

**Bush varieties** bear fruit slightly earlier than vining varieties, and are easier to care for and harvest.

"Burpless" varieties have been selected to eliminate gas build-up that affects some people.

Seedless European varieties bred for greenhouse production usually perform poorly in gardens.

In the coldest areas of the state, choose early-season varieties and/or use black plastic mulch, row covers, and other season extenders to speed soil warming and protect plants. Choose disease-resistant varieties to reduce the disease problems.

**Some varieties recommended for New York:**

**Slicing:**

Burpless Hybrid II

Greensleeves

Marketmore 76

Marketmore 80

Orient Express

Raider

Spacemaster

Sweet Slice

**Pickling:**

National

Regal

Several other species in the genus *Cucumis* are also called cucumbers:

West Indian gherkins, *Cucumis anguria*. Gherkin pickles are usually just immature common cucumbers, *Cucumis sativus*.

Chinese or Asian cucumbers, *Cucumis melo* var. *conomon*. These are the same species as melons and cantaloupes. Often much longer than common cucumbers (up to 20 inches), Asian cucumbers produce few seeds and are "burpless." Grow on trellises if you want straight fruit.

African horned cucumber, *Cucumis metuliferus*. Often sold under the tradename kiwano, it is more commonly used like a fruit.

Source: <http://www.explore.cornell.edu> 2006

This publication may contain pesticide recommendations. Changes in pesticide regulations occur constantly, some materials mentioned may no longer be available, and some uses may no longer be legal. All pesticides distributed, sold, and/or applied in New York State must be registered with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Questions concerning the legality and/or registration status for pesticide use in New York State should be directed to the appropriate Cornell Cooperative Extension Specialist or your regional DEC office. **READ THE LABEL BEFORE APPLYING ANY PESTICIDE.**