



# Nature & Nurture Seeds' Guide to Growing & Using Cucumbers

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## The wonderful world of cukes

Calling all cukes and cukettes! These refreshing and crisp garden favorites actually originated in India, so it takes a wee bit of coaxing and special care to grow these veggies in the midwest. But it's a lot easier than you might think! Once you've got the know-how from this growing resource, you'll be off to the \*cucumber growing\* races!

[Click here](#) to learn more about the cucumber's fascinating journey across the world.

## Why Grow Cucumbers?

Here are some reasons why cucumbers are awesome and why you should grow them:

1. **They're nutritious:** Although for many years, cukes were thought of as a "diet" food, they've been found to contain important phytonutrients.
2. **They are easy to preserve** using traditional fermentation methods, more commonly known as "pickling!" It's as easy as adding cukes, salt and water to a mason jar and waiting.
3. **They're cool and refreshing on a hot summer day!**

## Types of Cucumbers

As with most things, the species "Cucumis sativus" exists along a spectrum; there are huge, torpedo-like cukes, small, yellow ones, bumpy and spiny pickling varieties, and long, thin Asian types. But here are the two categories you'll most likely be seeing in seed catalogs.

1. **“Slicers”**: These are the more common type of cucumbers that so many eaters are familiar with. They tend to be on the larger and longer side, and are used more for salads or cooking rather than pickling.
2. **Pickling types**: These are usually smaller varieties that are commonly preserved as pickles but are often great in salads too!

## Growing Cucumbers

### Starting Seeds

- 1) Inside:
  - a) Cucumbers do not like their roots to be disturbed during transplanting so if you're starting seeds indoors, use biodegradable pots.
  - b) Start seeds indoors 5/1 into a good seed starting mix (we recommend Vermont Compost's Fort Light). Sow 3-4 seeds ½" deep in each pot.
  - c) Temperature for germination: 75-95°F (Use a heating mat or place them on top of the fridge for extra heat).
  - d) Cucumber seedlings are sensitive to damping off fungus so keep soil lightly moist but not too wet and use a fan (set to low) to provide air circulation.
  - e) Once 2 leaves appear, grow plants at 72°F and snip off (don't pull) all but the most vigorous seedling from each pot.
  - f) Transplant outdoors around 6/1 when warm temperatures have settled in.
- 2) Outside:
  - a) Direct sow seeds outdoors around 6/1. Sow seeds ½" deep.
  - b) Sow seeds in patches or rows.
    - i) Patches: sow 2-3 seeds per patch with patches spaced 1 foot apart (plant to thin plants to 1 plant per patch)
    - ii) Rows: sow 2 seeds per foot in rows 3 feet apart; plan to thin plants to 1 plant per foot

### Transplanting Outdoors

- 1) Hardening off your plants: For 1-2 weeks before transplanting, start hardening off your plants. Put them outdoors for gradually longer increments of time during the day, starting at 15 minutes the first day, 30 minutes the second, etc. Observe how your cucumbers look after putting them outside each time to determine how long you should keep them out the next day. If they look wilted after 30 minutes, go back to 15. Use your best judgment.
- 2) Transplant cucumber seedlings outdoors (plant the entire biodegradable pot into the soil) around 6/1 into fertile soil with lots of compost or decomposed manure.
- 3) Water seedlings after planting.

- 4) For an extra boost, foliar feed young cucumber plants 1 week after transplanting with fish/seaweed fertilizer.

### **Growing Tips**

- 1) Pests and diseases:
  - a) Protect seedlings from slugs - we use Sluggo at planting time.
  - b) Protect plants from deer and groundhogs.
  - c) Protect seedlings from cucumber beetles by covering plants with row cover fabric at planting and leave it on until plants are flowering.
  - d) Inspect plants regularly and handpick any cucumber beetles and shake them into a jar of soapy water.
  - e) Use "[crop rotation](#)" to minimize pest and diseases
  - f) Minimize the spread of disease by not handling wet vines.
- 2) Water your cucumbers well! Remember how juicy and crisp and watery their fruit is? Well, that water's gotta come from somewhere. Underwatered cukes will likely be tasteless and bitter.

### **Harvesting**

Harvest cucumbers regularly to maximize production, picking the fruit once it's reached its characteristic green color. Younger fruit of slicing cukes can be harvested when even smaller, especially for pickles.

Gently twist or clip off cucumbers; be careful not to break the vines.

### **Storage**

Cucumbers keep refrigerated for 1-2 weeks, but pickling is the best method for long-term storage. Check out our Guide to Live Fermentation [here!](#)

### **Seed Saving**

Cucumbers are insect pollinated and cross-pollinated. They will cross with any cucumber varieties within ½ mile. You can always save seed and see what you get!

Allow cucumber fruit to mature fully (they will be large, hard, and yellow/orange). Scoop out seed, rinse, and dry on a screen.

Minimum population size: 6-25 plants.

## Recipes

Check out full cucumber recipes on our website under "Recipes!"

[Erica's Summer Salad](#)

[Mizeria \(Polish Cucumber Salad\)](#)

[Sesame Kale Amaranth Cucumber Salad](#)



**Happy Growing!**