

CUCUMBER

One of the most popular garden vegetables, cucumbers are divided into two categories: 'slicers' and "picklers". They can be used interchangeably, young slicers as pickles, and more mature picklers as slicers, and all do well in Utah once the danger of frost has passed. Cool and refreshing during the hot days of summer, use them in salads, fresh cut with balsamic vinegar or ranch dressing, or just pick and eat right in the garden. Cucumbers are easy to germinate and not difficult to grow, but still have a few quirks. If you know some of our secrets, you will be a successful "Cuke" grower in no time flat.

SOIL PREPARATION

Cucumbers prefer a sandy soil, rich in organic matter, well drained, and not too heavy. They also need full sun exposure. Before planting, incorporate 1-2 inches of well composted organic matter, Humic, and 1 lb. of all-purpose fertilizer (we recommend "That's all it Takes" complete fertilizer or Happy Frog Organic Tomato & Vegetable Food) per 100 square feet and work them in to a depth of 4-6 inches. Heavy, clay-based soils must be amended with compost and organic matter to encourage and allow for good root development. For best results, add 2-4 inches of a variety of different types of organic matter and 50 lbs. of Zeolite soil conditioner per 100 square feet each fall for multiple years to increase drainage and nutrient availability. By doing this yearly, over time you can create a better growing environment for your garden plants to thrive in and produce. Please consult our Soil Preparation Guide in the attached appendix.

PLANTING

We have had success both from transplant or from seed when planting cucumbers - but in both cases, it is best if you start by solarizing your soil with black or clear plastic mulch or weed barrier, 2-3 weeks before you want to plant. If starting seeds indoors, choose a warm location for germination (at least 75 degrees) and use a light seed-starting soil. We start our seedlings 3 weeks before setting them outside, so for Cache Valley, the last week of April is perfect. Just after Mother's Day, cut holes into your plastic or weed barrier mulch at 4-6 foot intervals and then plant your seedlings the same depth as they are in their containers, and water them thoroughly with Kangaroots root stimulator. The Kangaroots helps prevent transplant shock and aids in establishing a strong root system quickly.

If starting from seed directly in the garden, use the same spacing and planting time as for transplanting. Make a shallow, round depression in each cut (in the plastic mulch), place 4-6 seeds in each hole, and cover them with 1/4-1/2 inch of peat moss, light potting soil, or Coconut Coir, and tamp the soil down gently with your hand. We also have had great success planting cucumbers in rows, with spacing about 3-4 inches between the seeds. It gives you a thick, productive patch of vines that is more condensed and easier to trellis if desired. Water with the Kangaroots, and cover the area with a hot cap, Wall-o-Water or Aquadome to help retain the heat and moisture. The seedlings should emerge in 7-14 days with adequate heat.



VARIETIES

Everyone has an opinion on which cucumbers are the best, but they all have unique qualities that make them outstanding in their own right. At Anderson's our favorite cucumber for flavor and quality is Tasty Green. The long (9-12 inches), slender, dark green fruits are mild tasting, sweet, and virtually seedless. For a standard 7-8 inch green slicing cucumber, Burpless Supreme/Gateway has a compact vine, and resists weather fluctuations better than any cucumber on the market, and Straight 8 and Marketmore are heirloom standards of great quality that produce well. Armenian can grow up to 15 inches long and has thin, light green skin. Lemon cukes are round, yellow, and full of seeds, but they are fun to grow and tasty. Pickling cukes can grow blocky and rough, but Pioneer and Homemade Pickles are two that stay

small longer and keep their crisp texture when bottled.

WATER

Cucumbers require frequent watering, usually about 1-2 inches per week in 2-3 applications. Water stress causes bitterness, misshapen fruit, and tough skin. Use drip or soaker irrigation if possible, and mulch heavily around the plants with an organic mulch to retain soil moisture and to prevent weeds. Since they have a shallow root system, be careful when cultivating close to the plant, and during warm, dry weather, they are prone to dry out quickly. We can't stress enough the importance of using plastic mulch or weed barrier around the cucumbers to prevent weeds, heat up the soil, and prevent damage from moisture loss. Your goal is soil that is consistently moist, but not soggy.

FERTILIZER

About 4-6 weeks after germination or transplant, usually about the time the vines start to run, apply a balanced vegetable food ("That's All it Takes" or Happy Frog Organic Tomato & Vegetable Food) around the base of the plants and water thoroughly. Use about 1/4 cup per hill. For some quick growth, especially around the time they start to flower and set fruit, use Ferti-lome Blooming and Rooting water soluble fertilizer or an organic alternative like Seedlinger's Universal Plant Food weekly to kick them into fruit production mode. Since cucumbers can be difficult to grow under dry, stressful conditions, we always recommend an application of beneficial microbes and mycorrhizae (Kangaroots or Myke supplements) to help with their development. Your plants will be healthier, more vigorous, and produce fruits faster and for a much longer harvest.

CUCUMBER	
PLANTING TIME	Group D
PLANTING METHOD	Mounds/ Trellised rows
MOUND SPACING	1-2'
SEED DEPTH	1/4"
TIME TO HARVEST	70-100 Days
WATER NEEDS	1", 3x weekly
TRANSPLANT/ DIRECT SOW	Direct or Transplant
SPECIAL ISSUES	Powdery Mildew Cucumber Beetles, aphids, spider mites Verticillium and Fusarium virus

SUPPORT

Vines can be trained up trellises, poles, fences, or other hardware to keep cucumbers off ground. Trellising cucumbers will reduce the amount of space the plants occupy (especially helpful for smaller or raised bed gardens) and allows the fruits to grow long and slender. You'll also notice less curling and more consistent ripening.

COMMON PROBLEMS

Not many insects bother cucumbers, but watch for cucumber beetles, aphids, and spider mites. Mites can damage leaves quickly without notice, sapping strength from the plants and severely limiting fruit production. Ferti-lome Spinosad Soap insecticide or Triple Action Insecticide (Organic) are great options for controlling these invaders. Powdery mildew is almost as destructive to cucumber vines. In late July (or earlier if the weather is hot and humid with cool nights), start spraying vines with Fertilome Copper soap or Fungicide 5 to prevent mildew from ruining your crop. All it takes is a week or two of mildew to stop the vines from flowering and producing fruit. Use crop rotation and mycorrhizae to help prevent the vines from picking up Verticillium and Fusarium diseases that will quickly kill them just as they start to produce.

HARVEST

Pick cucumbers as soon as they reach 2-3 inches long for pickling varieties, and 5-6 inches for slicers. Don't leave them on the vines too long, as they will start to produce seed, and lose flavor quickly. Try to harvest every other day if possible. Frequent picking will encourage more blossoms and fruit set, and prevent old fruits from sapping vital strength from the vines. Harvest until frost kills the vines or until nighttime temperatures prohibit fruit set.

