

Growing Your Own

A beginner's guide to gardening

Cucumbers

Cucumbers are a warm-weather crop that you can grow from a seed or transplant. They give many harvests over one to two months and can be enjoyed fresh or pickled.

Varieties

There are two common types of cucumbers: slicers and picklers.

Pickling cucumbers are often shorter, plumper, and have thicker skin. Despite their names, you can also eat picklers fresh or pickle slicing cucumbers. Burpless cucumbers are bred to be less bitter and easy to digest. Bush cucumbers are good for growing in containers or small gardens.

Most varieties of cucumbers will thrive in Kentucky. You could try some that are listed in this publication. Cucumbers can get diseases. Choose disease-resistant kinds when you can.

Slicing

- Amiga (Beit Alpha)
- Cobra
- Dasher II
- Diva
- General Lee
- Olympian
- Saladbush (bush)
- Saladmore (bush)
- Sweet Burpless
- Sweet Success
- Tasty Green
- Turbo

Pickling

- Bush Pickle (bush)
- Calypso
- H-19 Little Leaf (bush)



Diva
Johnny's Selected Seeds



General Lee
Johnny's Selected Seeds



H-19 Little Leaf
Johnny's Selected Seeds

Cucumber Planting

Seed Depth ½–1 inch

	Trellised	Untrellised
Rows	30 inches apart	3-4 feet apart
Direct Seed	3 inches apart	3 inches apart
Thin to	12-18 inches apart	2-3 feet apart

Safe Planting Dates

Eastern Kentucky	May 10–June 15
Central Kentucky	May 1–July 1
Western Kentucky	April 20–July 15

How much to plant

Cucumber plants can bear a lot of fruit. Plant one to two plants per person or three to four plants for a family of four. Plant more if you want to pickle and preserve your cucumber harvest.

When and how to plant

Cucumbers are a warm-season crop. Don't plant them until the risk of frost has passed in your region. A second planting can provide cucumbers through early fall, but pests and disease can be worse later in the summer. See the Cucumber Planting table for planting dates for your region.

Cucumbers need full sun and well-draining soil. Cucumber vines spread. Plant on a trellis or along a fence. This will save your garden space and help keep the fruit off the ground. If you don't have much space, bush cucumbers are great to grow in pots, but they are not as fruitful as vining cucumbers.

You can trellis vining cucumbers using materials you might have on hand. You can use wire fencing, an old ladder, trellis netting, stakes with twine, or a pyramid or teepee made of bamboo. The vines can be heavy and benefit from trellising. They will climb almost anything.



Cucumber tendrils grab anything.
Erika Olsen, University of Kentucky



Netting trellis
Erika Olsen, University of Kentucky

Plant cucumber seeds in the garden or start them inside in trays a couple weeks before moving them to the garden. You can also buy transplants, but cucumbers are very easy to grow from seed. Plant seeds about one inch deep.

- **If trellised**, plant seeds three inches apart in rows spaced 30 inches apart. Once plants are five inches tall, thin to one plant every 12 to 18 inches. Plant transplants 12 inches apart.
- **Untrellised** rows need to be spaced three to four feet apart. Plant four to five seeds per foot. Once plants are five inches tall, thin plants to be spaced two to three feet apart in the row.

Fertilize the soil with an all-purpose garden fertilizer before planting. A week after plants start to bloom, add a high-nitrogen fertilizer like blood meal or feather meal. Place along one side of the row, about six inches from the plants. This is called side dressing. Repeat this about three weeks later.

Do not overfertilize, as this will boost vine growth but not fruiting. Follow the label guidelines for adding any fertilizers.

Pests and diseases

Cucumbers can have many problems throughout the season. Protect young plants from cutworms by placing a cardboard tube around the base of the plant. Watch for cucumber beetles and remove them. They can infect even small plants with bacterial wilt.

Keep soil moist but not wet to prevent blossom end rot. Apply a mulch of straw, shredded newspaper, or any organic mulch to help keep soil moist and weeds out. Aim water at the base of the plant to keep leaves dry and prevent disease.

Move cucumbers to a new bed in the garden each year to lessen soil-based disease problems.

Misshapen fruit or lack of fruit is often because of poor pollination. This can happen during rainy weather or high temperatures.

Do not apply pesticides in the garden once plants are blooming, since bees need to pollinate the flowers. If you need to use pesticides, apply them in the late afternoon to avoid hurting pollinators. For more tips on handling pests and diseases, check the UK Cooperative Extension publication *Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky* (ID-128) at <https://publications.ca.uky.edu/id-128> or contact your county Extension agent.

Harvesting

Pick cucumbers when they are three to nine inches long. Cut the stem right above the fruit. Plants will bear fruit for six to eight weeks total and will bear much more fruit when you pick often. Older cucumbers will turn yellow and taste bitter, and they will stop the plant from making new fruit. Remove any old, yellow cucumbers.



Bacterial wilt

Gerald Holmes, Strawberry Center, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Bugwood.org, CC BY-NC 3.0



Misshapen cucumber

Gerald Holmes, Strawberry Center, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Bugwood.org, CC BY-NC 3.0



Spotted cucumber beetle

Gerald Holmes, Strawberry Center, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Bugwood.org, CC BY-NC 3.0



Asian cucumber salad with red onion, black sesame seeds, and minced red pepper

Serving

Cucumbers are a healthy, low-calorie food, rich in minerals such as magnesium and potassium. They are high in water, vitamin K, and antioxidants.

You can eat cucumbers raw or pickled. Eat them in sticks as a snack, add slices to a sandwich, or put julienne strips on a rice bowl. Cucumber slices are great in water. You can even use seedless cucumber chunks as a base for a refreshing smoothie. You can “quick pickle” cucumbers in a sweet or salty brine and refrigerate, or you can pickle and then can them for longer storage.

Storing

Loosely wrap cucumbers in a paper towel or light cloth to soak up any moisture. Store inside a plastic bag in the warmest part of the fridge, and they should keep for at least a week. You can also store cucumbers at room temperature. Put them in a cool spot, away from direct sunlight. They should keep for up to a week.

Clean up

Remove plants from the ground as soon as they finish fruiting, around 70 days from the time you planted them. Throw them away or compost healthy vines. Don't put diseased plants in the compost pile.

Summary

Varieties

Cucumber fruits come in two types: slicers and picklers. Diva, General Lee, and Sweet Burpless are good slicer types to grow in Kentucky. Calypso and H-19 Little Leaf are good pickler types to grow. Cucumber plants are either vining or bush types.

How much to plant

One to two plants are enough for one person, or three to four plants for a family. Plant more if you want to pickle and preserve.

How and when to plant

Cucumbers are a warm-weather plant. Plant after safe dates, following the spacing guidelines in the planting chart. Trellis to grow more cucumbers in less space.

Pests and diseases

Cucumbers can get bacterial wilt from cucumber beetles. Keep soil moist but not wet to avoid blossom end rot.

Harvesting

Harvest cucumbers when they are three to nine inches long. Cut the stem right above the fruit.

Serving

Eat cucumbers raw in salads, sandwiches, and as a snack. You can also pickle them.

Storing

Store dry in the warm part of the refrigerator. Or store in a cool, dark spot at room temperature for up to a week.

Clean up

Harvest vines as soon as they stop fruiting, about 70 days after planting. Throw away or compost healthy vines.

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