

CUKES FOR BACKYARD GARDENS

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A salad is hardly a salad without a slice or two of cucumber! With backyard vegetable gardening becoming popular again, knowing how to grow your own vegetables, in this case cucumbers, is a great way to have fresh and readily available produce. Growing cucumbers is not without its problems, but you can get a crop with proper selection and management.

The first important step in cucumber production is picking a good variety. Varieties should have the capacity to produce a fair crop and display disease resistance. Good disease resistance is particularly important in our warm and humid environment. Selection of varieties should also be based on what you intend to do with the cucumber. Is the cucumber for slicing or pickling? A good slicing variety is 'Poinsett' which offers disease resistance and high yields. 'Ashley' is another good selection with good yields and resistance to both downy and powdery mildew. Other types of slicing cucumbers worth trying include 'Sweet Success', 'Victory', 'Gemini', 'Stricker', 'Centurian', and 'Slice Nice'. Some good pickling cucumbers include 'Ohio MR-17' which is very vigorous and mosaic resistant, and 'Wisconsin SMR-18' which is resistant to scab disease. Others pickle-types include 'Pixie', 'Galaxy', 'Chipper' and 'Sumter'. You may have to search around for some of these varieties best suited for Florida. Again, selecting a cucumber for disease resistance goes a long way towards success. Look for cucumber seed packs which indicate disease resistance

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such as “A” for anthracnose, “B” for bacterial wilt, “P” for powdery mildew, and so on.

Cucumbers will do best in a full sun location with lots of organic matter incorporated into the soil. Adding plenty of compost, composted cow manure or some other type of organic matter is important. In addition, prior to planting, broadcast one quart of general purpose vegetable fertilizer such as a 6-6-6, or its equivalent, for every 25 feet of garden row. Work this into the top three inches of soil as you prepare the planting bed. About three-inches on either side of the planting row, make a linear furrow and apply an additional half-quart of fertilizer per 25 foot row. Cover the furrows with soil, water it in and the planting bed is ready to plant. Plant the cucumber seeds about three-quarters of an inch deep with plants spaced at a final distance of eight

inches between plants. Every two weeks side dress a scattering of fertilizer per plant and water this in. The use of drip irrigation is a recommended watering practice as this keeps the leaves dry and conserves water.

It will take from forty to 55 days from seed until you harvest your first cucumber. During that time, in addition to various leaf diseases and insect pests, there can be other types of problems. Pollination can be affected if there is insufficient bee activity. Keep in mind that it is normal for male flowers to drop. Nematodes can also be a problem by causing knotted roots and stunting plants. Soil solarization and/or crop rotation can help reduce nematode populations. Keep weeds at least a foot from your cucumber plants. Some leaf diseases may need to be managed with selected fungicides. Various insects such as aphids and assorted caterpillars may also require an intervention with least-toxic chemicals.

Regularly pick your cucumbers while they are young and crisp. Make sure to pick any cucumbers that get by you and become too big so that new fruits will continue to be produced. You can grow these salad favorites!

Resources:

- Stephens, J.M. (2003) *Cucumbers in the Florida Garden*. UF/IFAS Extension Service.
- Stephens, J.M., Brown, S.P., Treadwell, D., Webb, S., Gevens, A., Dunn, R.A., Kidder, G., Short, D., & Simone, G.W. (2009) *Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide*. The University of Florida Extension Service, IFAS.

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