

YEAR OF THE CUCUMBER 2020

Impress your friends and grow your own cucumbers, it's much easier than you think



Imagine picking your own homegrown cucumber fresh from your garden. If you love the crispy cool cucumber texture grow your own for that freshly-picked crunchy real cucumber taste. Growing your own amplifies everything that's great about these versatile fruits. Transform your summer menus into a juicy mix of sliced, cubed cucumber blushed with the bloom of summer. Eat them fresh, pickled or even with sugar to make the most of every single cucumber, because once they get growing each plant will produce lots and lots of juicy fruit. With just two or three plants you'll be searching for innovative ways to use them and sharing your homegrown bounty with friends and family.

MONEY SAVING

Be honest, how much do you spend on summer salad from the supermarket? A punnet of tomatoes, a bag of salad leaves and a cucumber is plenty to make a summer lunch

or supper. But it adds up fast and actually you can grow all of those for a fraction of the cost. Spend one week's salad budget on seeds or ready to grow plants and in a few weeks time you'll be reaping the rewards. Cucumbers are such a vital part of the summer menu. And when you've got them growing in the garden or greenhouse, you've got a living larder to plunder for fresh ingredients. Nothing beats the freshly picked flavour, texture and self-satisfaction of growing your own. What's more you are totally in control of how you feed your plants, what you grow them in and whether you spray them with pesticides. Choose to grow them organically and you double their inherent value too..

BIG AND SMALL

There's a huge range of cucumber varieties to choose from. The latest newly bred varieties command higher prices, especially as seed; you might find just four or five seeds in a

packet; but that's all you need. Some of the tried and tested well-known varieties are more widely available with several seeds to a packet. Look out for mini cucs - snack size fruits ideal for lunchboxes. Long cucumbers for slicing will produce the large fruits similar to those you see in the supermarket. You can also buy pickling cucumbers, which produce more, tiny fruits for pickles and preserves. Tip - Always check how many seeds are in each packet.

KITCHEN CUCUMBERS

A fresh supply of home-grown cucumbers will take your summer menus to new heights, provide endless snack size fruits for the kids and ensure your five a day is achievable every day. You can slice, cube or carve your cucumbers into sticks for salads, summer drinks and garnishes. Use them for dipping into dips, chop

Care and attention

Cucumbers are heavy feeders. Plant them in a sunny spot and feed well. For more flowers and resultant fruit choose a plant food rich in potash. It's no surprise that these plants bearing such watery fruits need plenty of water to keep them growing strongly. If growing outside improve the soil with plenty of organic matter and keep the plants well watered. Under glass plant them into grow bags and set up an automatic watering system to ensure your plants get regular watering especially when the fruit is setting. As the fruit develop they get heavy so it is important to tie in the plants to a secure framework and support the weight of the developing fruits - strong bamboo canes are ideal for this. But if you are growing outdoors you can allow the plants to clamber over the ground, but place straw beneath the developing fruit to keep them off the ground. Pick regularly to keep the plants producing and use fresh from the garden for the very best flavour.

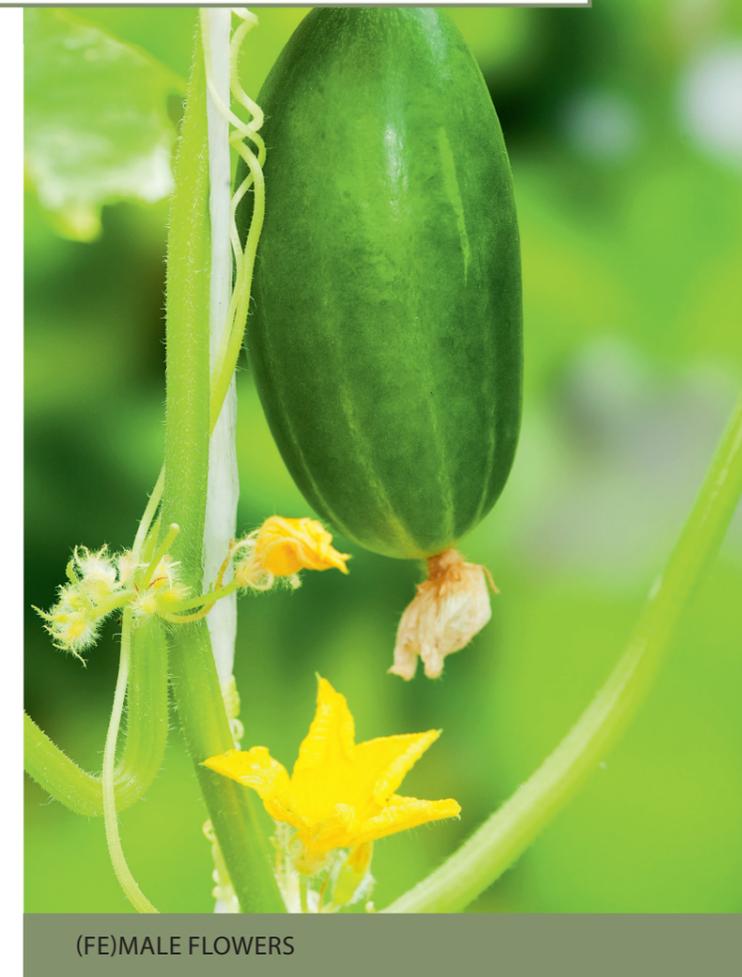


YEAR OF THE cucumber

finely and mix them with mint and yoghurt for a cool dressing or drizzle with honey for a melon-like treat. Mix them into fruit salads, snack on cucumber chunks between meals and use them to decorate your lunches, dinners and suppers. And don't forget the quintessential afternoon tea is not complete without a cucumber sandwich or two, a dust of sea salt, fresh homemade bread and butter and you've created a timeless classic for the kids lunchbox, unexpected visitors or just a guilty lunchtime treat.

MALE AND FEMALE

Cucumber plants like many plants have separate male and female flowers on the same plant. It's really easy to tell them apart, the female flowers have tiny cucumbers forming behind the flower, and the male flowers don't. You can buy all-female F1 cucumber varieties that don't have the male flowers; these tend to have lots of fruits over a shorter period. Other varieties with male and female flowers will produce the cucumbers over a longer period of time. On most outdoor varieties it's OK to just leave the male flowers on the plants. But some varieties do require the male flowers to be removed to prevent pollination because the developing fruit can be bitter and inedible, check the label or look up online for the best advice for the variety you are growing.



(FE) MALE FLOWERS

Easy 2 grow

If you can grow courgettes, you can grow cucumbers. They are closely related, prolific croppers and can be grown in the garden, in pots or in a greenhouse. The secret is to choose the type of plant carefully. That's because some cucumbers have been bred to grow happily outdoors and others do require the protection of a greenhouse. There are a few that can be grown indoors and out. Simply check the seed packets or plant labels and pay heed to the plant's needs, that way you will ensure success.



EASY FROM SEED

Cucumbers are easy to grow from seed; especially if you have grown from seed before. Sow seed with gentle heat in early spring for a greenhouse crop or mid spring for an outdoor crop. Plant two seeds into a small pot or module filled with quality seed compost. If both germinate remove the weaker seedling and allow the other one to mature. When the roots have filled the pot or module plant up into a slightly larger pot. For greenhouse growing two plants can be planted into a growing bag under glass. Keep well fed and watered. For outdoor crops the plants must be kept frost-free until all danger of frost has passed. Get them acclimatised to the outdoor temperatures by moving them into a cold frame for a week or so before planting out into a sunny position outdoors.