

Easy Gardening...Cucumbers

Sam Cotner and Jerry Parsons, Extension Horticulturists
Texas Agricultural Extension Service

Cucumbers are grown for eating fresh or preserving as pickles. They must be grown in warm temperatures and full sunlight, and will not stand frost. Cucumbers mature quickly and are best suited to large gardens but can be grown in small areas if caged or trellised.

Soil Preparation

Cucumbers do best in loose, sandy loam soil but can be grown in any well drained soil. Remove rocks, large sticks and trash before preparing the soil. Leave fine pieces of plant material such as dead grass and small weeds. They will help enrich the soil when turned under. Spade the soil to a depth of 8 to 12 inches. This is about the depth reached by most shovels or spading forks. Turn each shovel of soil completely over so all plant materials are covered with soil (Figure 1).

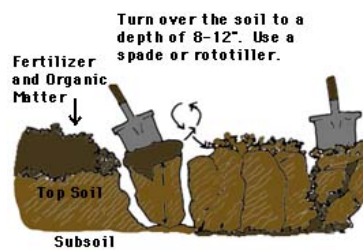
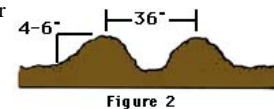


Figure 1

Fertilizing

Cucumbers require plenty of fertilizer. Scatter 1 cup of a complete fertilizer such as 10-10-10 or 10-20-10 for each 10 feet of row. Work the fertilizer into the soil and leave the surface smooth.

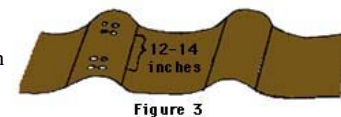
Work the soil into beds 4 to 6 inches high and at least 36 inches apart (Figure 2).



Ridges are especially important in heavy soils and poorly drained areas because cucumbers must have good drainage.

Planting

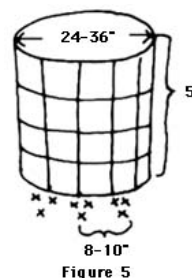
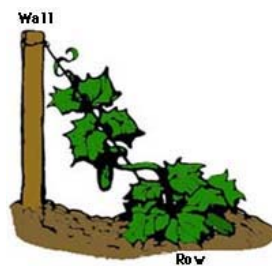
Since cucumbers are a vine crop they require a lot of space. Vines can reach 6 to 8 feet or more. In large gardens cucumbers can spread out on the ground. Plant cucumbers in rows on the ridges prepared earlier. Use a hoe or stick to make a small furrow about 1 inch deep down the center of each ridge. Drop three or four seeds in groups every 12 to 14 inches down the row. By planting several seeds, you are more likely to get a stand. Remove extra plants soon after emergence (Figure 3).



Use three to four seeds in each spot to help plants push through.

Cover the seed about 1 inch deep with fine soil. Use the flat side of a hoe to firm the soil over the seeds, but do not pack it.

In small gardens, train cucumbers on a fence, trellis or cage if wire is available. Plant three or four seeds in hills 4 to 6 inches high along the trellis or cage (Figures 4 and 5).



Cucumber roots reach down 36 to 48 inches, so do not plant where tree roots will rob them of water and nutrients. Do not plant cucumbers until all danger of frost has passed and the soil begins to warm.

Plant fast-maturing crops such as lettuce and radishes between the cucumber hills to save space. These will be harvested before the cucumber

vines get too large.

Varieties

Two types of cucumbers are grown.Slicing types get 6 to 8 inches long and 1 inch or more in diameter when mature. Pickling types are 3 to 4 inches long and up to 1 inch in diameter at maturity. Both types can be used for pickling if picked when small.

Pickling Variety	Slicing Variety
National Pickling Carolina Multipik	Poinsett Straight 8 Sweet Slice Sweet Success

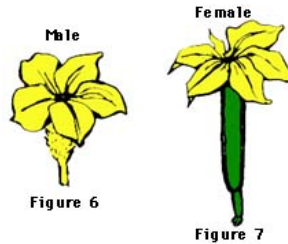
After Planting

Keep cucumbers as weed-free as possible. Do not plow or hoe the soil deeper than about 1 inch because feeder roots may be cut and plant growth slowed.




Apply about 1/2 cup of fertilizer for each 10 feet of row or 1 tablespoon per plant when the vines are about 10 to 12 inches long.

Soak the plants well with water weekly if it does not rain.

Cucumbers have two different flowers, male and female. See figures 6 and 7. Male flowers open first and always drop off. Female flowers form the cucumber and should not drop off. If female flowers begin to drop, touch the inside of each male and female flower with a soft brush or cotton swab. This pollinates the flowers and helps them develop into fruit.



Insects

	Name and description	Control
 Striped cucumber beetle	1/4 inch long; yellow-green with three black stripes.	Diazinon
 Spotted cucumber beetle	1/4 inch long; yellow-green with 12 black spots	Diazinon
 Squash bug	up to 1 inch long; grey-brown, reddish brown when small	Sevin or Thiodan

Diseases

Several different diseases attack cucumbers. Most show up as spots on the upper or lower sides of leaves or on fruit. Check plants daily and spray with an approved fungicide. Ask your county Extension agent or program assistant for help.

Harvesting

Harvest cucumbers when they reach the desired size. Do not wait until they turn yellow. Yellow cucumbers are overmature and will be strong flavored and of poor quality.

Hypertext markup and graphics colorization by Gretchen Eagle and Dan Lineberger. <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/extension/easygardening/cucumber/cucumber.html>