

Cucumbers In The Florida Garden¹

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Cucumbers, often dubbed "cukes," are a popular garden crop throughout Florida because they are easy to grow and are so well-liked in both fresh and pickled forms (see Table 2 for recipe). At one season or another they may be grown successfully in all areas of the state. Ample space must be provided since the cucumber is a vining plant.

Cucumber is well-adapted to container culture and to trellising. Planting alongside the garden fence is one popular way to provide a ready made trellis.

Cucumber is a warm-season crop. Injury due to frost and cold winds may be expected when temperatures drop into the thirties.

VARIETIES

Seed companies offer a wide assortment of named varieties of cucumbers from which the gardener may choose. Many of these may give satisfactory results when grown in Florida and should be planted on a trial basis. The following varieties are suggested based on general availability of seed and satisfactory performance under Florida conditions.

Slicers

Fruits of these varieties are generally used uncooked in salads or vinegar; however, young "cukes" may be pickled (see Table 2 for recipe).

Marketer— Old standard variety — fair yielding, but susceptible to diseases.

Supersett— disease resistant hybrid gynoecious (all female flowers) variety.

Dasher II— Early gynoecious hybrid produces lots of 8-inch fruits in Florida.

Ashley— Good yielding, resistant to downy and powdery mildew diseases. Fruits shorter than Marketer.

Poinsett— High yielding, good disease resistance. Recent standard variety.

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Cherokee— Female flowering (gynoecious) hybrid variety; seeds come mixed with male pollinator variety. Productive and good disease resistance.

Others worth trying— Sweet Success, Victory, Gemini. New varieties: Striker, Centurian and Slice Nice. Oddities: White Wonder, Burpless; for hanging baskets, try Pot Luck.

Pickling Varieties

These fruits are usually much smaller than the slicers, making them ideal for pickling (see Table 2 for recipe).

Ohio MR-17— Black-spined, mosaic resistant, vigorous, productive. Fruit dark-green, warty, blocky, tapered.

Wisconsin SMR-18— Similar to MR-17, except fruits are medium green and resistant to scab disease.

Other pickling varieties suggested: male/female flowering — SMR-58, Pixie, Galaxy, Chipper and Sumter; female flowering — Carolina, Explorer, Premier, Score, Southern Cross, Triple Cross, Lucky Strike, Calypso, Miss Pickler.

Greenhouse Varieties

Hobby greenhouse enthusiasts should plant varieties that do not require bees for pollination. These are called "Parthenocarpic" varieties. They are long, slender, and seedless. Suggested are: Toska, Femfrance, Fabulous, and La Reine. Sweet Success is seedless and may be grown either in the greenhouse or the garden.

PLANTING INFORMATION

Cucumbers are started by planting seeds directly in the garden row or container. Sow seeds two or three times thicker than the distance suggested between plants. When first true leaves have formed, thin to desired spacing by pulling up unwanted plants. Cucumbers can not be transplanted unless growing in a transplant container. Table 1 lists when to plant.

WHEN TO PICK

Depending on variety and time of year grown, usually takes 40 to 55 days from seeding to first picking.

HOW TO PLANT

Seeds required per 100 foot of row — 1/2 ounce.

Seeds required per acre — 2 pounds.

Row width — 3 to 4 feet.

Distance between plants in the row — 4-8 inches.

Depth of seeds — 1/2 to 3/4 inch.

SOIL PREPARATION

A lot of work either chopping, spading, rototilling, or discing may be needed to get the soil ready to plant. Furthermore, acidic soils may need liming, and all will need fertilizing before planting the seeds. Lots of organic matter, such as compost, is beneficial.

LIMING

Cucumbers grow best on slightly acid soils - or pH 5.8 to 6.5. Lime should be applied if soil tests shows pH 5.5 or less. Your Extension Agricultural Agent can advise you on the exact amount and kind of lime needed. However, 3 to 5 pounds of dolomitic

limestone per 100 square feet, applied 1 to 3 months prior to planting, will usually be enough.

If soil pH is 6.5 or higher, minor plant foods such as iron and manganese should be applied either with the fertilizer to the soil or in a spray on the foliage. Compost and manures also can supply these micronutrients.

FERTILIZING

When preparing the cucumber row for planting, scatter (broadcast) one quart of garden fertilizer to every 25 foot length of row. Rake or chop this into the soil to a depth of about 3 to 4 inches. Then shape-up the bed. Now open shallow furrows about 3 inches on either side of the seed drill. Distribute one-half quart of the fertilizer in 25 feet of each furrow. Cover the fertilizer with soil and then water the prepared area before planting. This is all the fertilizer needed until the plants are growing. Every two or three weeks apply a little fertilizer by hand to the side of each plant and then water into the soil. The total amount of fertilizer needed to grow a 25 foot long row of cucumbers is about 4 quarts (6 pounds). Compost or animal manure such as aged chicken litter, can be substituted at 1/2 lb/sq ft.

CARING FOR THE PLANTS

The cucumbers will grow and produce with just a little care and attention about twice a week. Here are some things to watch for:

Weeds— Keep weeds pulled or hoed a foot or more from each plant. Do not use herbicides.

Insects— Watch for aphids, leaf miners, beetles, and fruit worms. If the insects become a severe problem, spray or dust with an approved insecticide. Wait until after 10 A.M. to spray so that bees are not killed.

Diseases— Cucumbers have quite a few disease enemies that may injure or destroy the plants. The first that might be noticed attacks the small seedling as it comes up. This seedling disease is called

"damping off." It is best prevented by planting seeds that have been treated with a fungicide.

The foliage is often next to be bothered. Most leaf-spotting diseases, some of which are called mildews, can be controlled by weekly spraying or dusting with one of the approved fungicides. Downy and powdery mildew are most often encountered on some varieties.

Fruit rot and diseases are best prevented by mulching to keep the fruits off the ground.

Plant Disease Resistant Varieties

The primary diseases to which varieties are most often resistant are: anthracnose (A); angular leaf spot (A/S); bacterial wilt (B); downy mildew (D); mosaic virus (M); powdery mildew (P); and scab (S).

WATERING

Keep the soil in the root zone well-moistened. Encourage deep rooting by watering thoroughly once or twice per week. Mixing organics such as compost into the soil helps conserve water. Consider using drip irrigation as this method conserves water and may improve yields.

PROBLEMS

In addition to the insect and disease problems already mentioned, other problems sometimes occur.

Poor pollination— Bees are needed to transfer pollen from male to female blossoms. Unless there is enough bee activity, fruits may drop or be poorly shaped. Do not be disturbed at the normal dropping of male flowers from the plant.

Nematode injury— The roots of cucumbers are quite often attacked and injured by root-knot and other nematodes. Solarization and crop rotation are the two best ways to help solve this problem.

HARVESTING

Pick cucumbers while they are still tender, crisp and green. Remove large fruits from the vine so that new fruits are encouraged to grow. Small young slicing cucumbers may be used for pickling also (see Table 2 for recipe). Pickling types make poor slicers because they get soft so fast. Bitterness is associated with a bitter substance in the peel. It is not known for certain why some fruits are more bitter than others. Peel toward the stem end so that the bitter principle is not spread from a point of high concentration (stem end) to the rest of the peeled fruit.

Table 1.

Table 1. When to Plant.	
North Florida (North of Ocala)	
Fall Garden	August - September
Winter Garden	Too cold outdoors
Spring Garden	February - April
Summer Garden	Too hot/humid for best results
Central Florida (Ocala-S. to Arcadia)	
Fall Garden	September
Winter Garden	Too cold outdoors
Spring Garden	January - March
Summer Garden	Too hot/humid for best results
South Florida (S of Arcadia to Key West)	
Fall Garden	September - October
Winter Garden	November - December
Spring Garden	January - March
Summer Garden	Too hot and humid