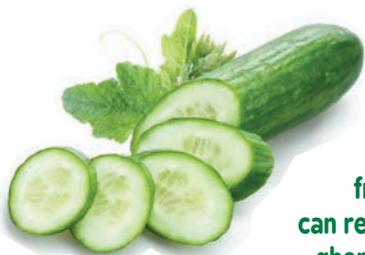


Growing Cucumbers

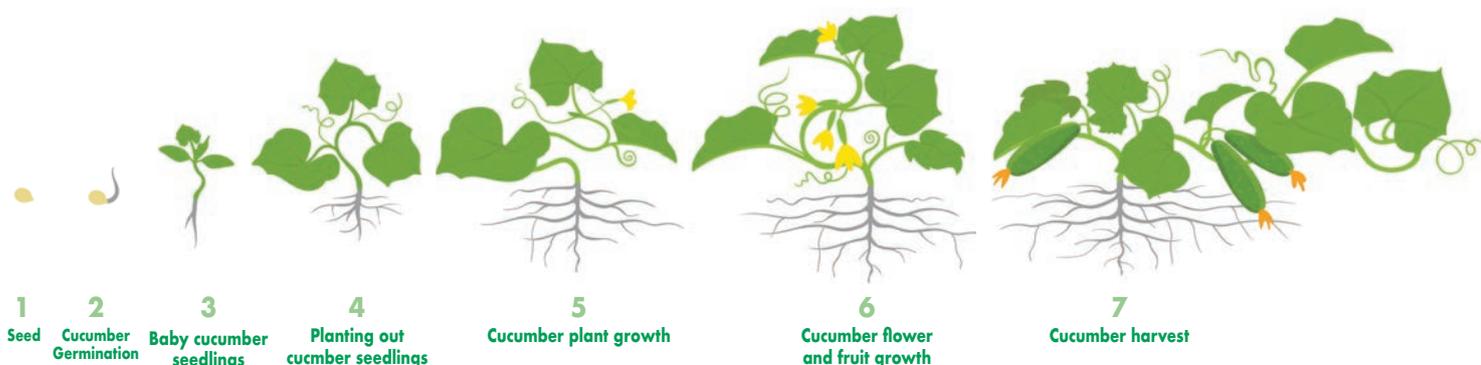


Cucumbers grow as a vine. They are an easy crop to grow through summer and can be grown from seed or seedling started as soils warm in spring. Cucumbers are part of the cucurbit family so are related to other summer vegetables such as pumpkins and squash.

Traditional cucumbers such as Lebanese cucumber produce long, dark-green fruit that is picked from when it is 10cm long. Burpless is a long green cucumber with a thin skin sold as low acid. Fruit can reach 40cm long. Apple cucumbers are round with creamy-white skin. Pickling cucumbers are called gherkins and are picked small (5-10cm in length). An ideal choice for pots is the patio cucumber sold as Cucumber Patio Snack, which is a small fruiting cucumber. Try a couple of different varieties to keep the vegie patch and table interesting. They are the perfect ingredient to throw into summer salsa, dip with tzatziki or slice for an old-fashioned cucumber sandwich for a high summer tea.

Cucumbers are 90 per cent water, which is why they feel cool and are low in fat and calories. They are also a good source of vitamins B and C. Most of the nutritional and health benefits lie in the skin, so eat the skin along with the cool white flesh.

LIFE CYCLE OF CUCUMBERS



When to plant

In most areas, it is easy to grow cucumbers from spring to autumn. Check hardware and garden centres for varieties in your local area.

1. In cold climates such as Tasmania, grow them as a summer to early autumn crop with plenty of shelter from cold winds.
2. In the tropics, cucumbers grow year-round but are best sown in autumn and spring.
3. In temperate zones to get a head start, start cucumber seeds or seedlings off in late winter or early spring in pots in a warm spot such as a glasshouse. Move them into the garden or a large pot as the soil and temperatures warm.

Location

- Cucumbers are usually trouble-free, particularly when grown with regular water along with protection from cold.
- In cool zones, they need a warm, sheltered but full sun position.
- In very hot areas provide shelter from the hot afternoon sun to reduce sunscald and water stress. They will grow in up to 50 per cent shade as long as the air is warm.
- Cucumbers are a vine but need support to climb, so consider planting close to a fence or providing a trellis or wire support.
- Cucumbers can be grown in large pots with the appropriate support. Move the pot around the garden or balcony to make the most of the available sunlight and shelter from wind.
- Companion plant with corn, legumes such as peas and beans, herbs such as dill or try flowering plants such as marigolds or nasturtiums.

Soil

Provide fertile, well-drained, slightly acid to neutral pH soil around 6.5 to 7.

In areas of poor drainage, grow cucumbers in raised garden beds.

As cucumbers are heavy feeders, add plenty of compost and aged manure to the soil before planting or apply **Seasol Liquid Compost**.

A soil rich in nutrients helps build strong plants so add Seasol Plant + Soil Booster (100g per square metre) and a fertiliser such as **PowerFeed Controlled Release Tomatoes & Vegetables**.

Water in well and let the soil rest for a week or two if possible.

Spreading organic mulch around the base of the plant helps to keep the roots cool and the soil moist.



Seasol[®]

*Check application rates on product labels or go to the Seasol website.

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Growing Cucumbers



1. Sowing seeds

- In the ground, seeds can be sown directly into warm, well-prepared soil. Sow seeds 12mm deep and 60-90cm apart into damp soil. Press the seed firmly into the soil and lightly cover it.
- In punnets, sow seeds in shallow rows into seed raising mix and cover with seed raising mix.
- In pots, grow one vine per pot or, if the pot is larger and the vines trained up a tepee structure, sow one seed at the base of each leg of the tepee.
- Water in well with **Seasol GOLD** or **Seasol** as this will help to increase seed germination rates.
- Soil should be moist but not wet, so check the soil moisture daily to ensure cucumber seeds have the right conditions to germinate.

2. Germination

- Keep the soil or potting mix moist but not wet and expect germination in 6-10 days. Check soil or potting mix daily to ensure it does not dry out.
- If growing in punnets, prick out small seedlings to transfer into individual 10cm pots to grow on before transplanting.
- For faster seed germination rates in seed trays, put them inside on a heating pad.
- When cucumber seeds sprout, they only have two leaves. These seedling leaves are narrow and unlike the adult leaves.
- Water gently and apply **Seasol GOLD** or **Seasol** weekly (Mix 30mL of concentrate per 9 litres of water) as this will help to stimulate strong root development and healthy growth.

3. Baby cucumber seedlings



- About two weeks after the seed leaves have opened, the true leaves will appear; these are the first cucumber leaves.
- If overcrowding occurs, select the strongest seedling and thin out or transplant the rest.
- Use scissors or tweezers to thin out seedlings to avoid disturbing young roots.
- Cucumber seedlings need a lot of nutrients to grow to produce a tasty bumper crop so, liquid feed with **PowerFeed PRO SERIES for Tomatoes & Vegetables** every 1 to 2 weeks. Increase the application rates from 20mL to 50mL of concentrate per 9 litres of water as the plants mature.
- Check soil moisture daily and water as needed. If possible water in the early morning when the plant is actively growing.

4. Planting out cucumber seedlings



- Transplant homegrown seedlings when they form two to three true leaves and are large enough to handle.
- Space or thin direct-sown seedlings to 40-60cm apart beside a stake or trellis.
- If growing several rows, space each row 1m apart. Most cucumbers are tall-growing vines that need plenty of space and the support of stakes, a tripod or trellis to grow strong and healthy.
- When seedlings have been purchased, planting according to the directions on the plant tag.
- To reduce transplant shock and aid plant establishment, water in well with **Seasol** after transplanting to promote rapid root growth and healthy plant growth.



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Growing Cucumbers



5. Cucumber plant growth



- Although cucumbers grow on a vine and want to sprawl across the ground, the vines are easier to tend and harvest if they are trained vertically. They can be grown in any sized vegetable garden or a large container.
- Manage their growth by training the vine up 1.5-2m-high stakes, a tripod or along a trellis. Growing cucumbers off the ground keep the fruit clear of the soil and reduce damage by pests or diseases.
- Encourage the young cucumber plants to climb onto the base of the stake or frame to keep the plants from sprawling over the ground. Use small twigs to aid climbing to the permanent support.
- Keep growing plants well-watered, directing water to the roots rather than over the leaves as wet foliage may encourage fungal diseases.
- Every 6-8 weeks apply another application of **PowerFeed PRO SERIES for Tomatoes & Vegetables** to produce a bumper crop of delicious cucumbers and to revitalise depleted soils. Remember to water it in thoroughly after application.

6. Cucumber flowering and fruiting



- Cucumbers produce male and female flowers on one plant. Male flowers, which don't develop fruit, can be more plentiful earlier in summer. Female flowers, which do form fruit, maybe more plentiful later in summer, as the days shorten. Bees carry pollen from the male flowers to the female flowers.
- Many modern varieties, however, produce female flowers only and don't need cross-pollination for fruiting. Developed for greenhouse production these varieties form fruit without fertilisation (known as parthenocarpic), which also means they won't form seeds.
- Flowers appear quickly and are small and yellow.
- Apply extra fertiliser such as **PowerFeed PRO SERIES for Tomatoes & Vegetables** as the flowers begin to grow. This will enable the fruit to form correctly and the plant to grow, keep flowering and to form heaps of tasty produce.
- The fruit forms fast and grows rapidly, so keep plants well-watered as fruit forms.

7. Cucumber harvest



- As cucumbers grow rapidly from a small, seedless fruit to become large and seedy, it is important to pick fruit frequently and when it is still small and tender to promote more flowering.
- Check for weeds and remove so they don't compete for space and nutrients.
- Top up mulch as required and removed diseased and dead foliage to keep insect and diseases at bay.
- As the fruit matures, it can also become bitter, and the skin becomes tough. Look for fruit 8 to 10 weeks from planting seedlings.



Things to watch out for...

- **Powdery mildew** is a fungal disease that often attacks plants at the end of the growing season. Where this occurs, remove the vine as it begins to dieback.
- **Snails or slugs** may damage fruit but are less of a problem when cucumbers are kept off the ground.
- **Lack of flower pollination** can occur so encourage bees by planting a diverse range of flowering plants near your vegie patch. If bees aren't around, try hand pollination by picking a male flower (one without a small fruit forming at the base) and touch it lightly onto the centre stem of the female flower.
- **Aphids, whitefly and red spider mite** love to munch on tasty cucumbers, consider spraying the **Sharp Shooter Natural Pyrethrum Spray** or a pest oil.

