

Cultural Details: Cucumbers

VHT013

Introduction

There are two types of cucumber. The greenhouse ('frame') cucumber is straight, cylindrical, smooth-skinned, and may reach 45cm in length. The outdoor ('ridge') cucumber is generally smaller, and may be covered in bumps or small spines.

Greenhouse cucumbers are parthenocarpic, that is they produce fruit without fertilization of the flowers. Non-hybrid types like Telegraph Improved produce male and female flowers. The male flowers (with a short, thin stalk behind the petals) should be retained. Non-hybrid outdoor cucumbers produce male and female flowers - keep both as fertilization is essential for fruit development. Do not grow non-hybrid ordinary varieties in the same greenhouse as the all-female F1 hybrids, as crosspollination will occur.

Programme (early crop)

Sow the large (30 per gram) seeds half an inch deep into paper tubes or peat pots, from December onwards. Germinate at 21-27°C. Growth cabinets can be used to hasten growth. Alternatively seed can be 'chitted' prior to sowing.

Pot up 7-10 days after sowing in 11-13cm pots. Handle very carefully to avoid root damage. Plant from late December to late February, once the plants are 30-38cm high with 8-10 leaves, in prepared beds 45-60cm apart.

Crop from February/March until September. Pick carefully by cutting through the supporting stalk. Harvest every 4-5 days, and keep the picked fruit cool. Minimum temperature should be 19°C for optimum production.

Mid-season Crop

Sow January. Pot on after 7-8 days. Plant up March. Crop April onwards.

Late Crop

Sow February to March (April for outdoor production). Pot 2-5 days later. Plant up April (early June for outdoor production). Crop May to October (late July to first frosts/end of September for the outdoor crop). Cucumbers planted in late April can be grown in cold or partially-heated glasshouses.

Growing systems

There is a number of methods to grow cucumbers. The chosen medium must be well aerated, and moisture-retentive, yet have good drainage (possibly by raising the bed above the surrounding ground level). In addition to direct planting into border soil, cucumbers can be successfully produced in:

Growbags

Large Pots

Ring Culture

Rockwool (in this case plants should be grown from the outset in the chosen medium)

Perlite.

Whichever method is chosen, watering and feeding should be carried out on a 'little and often' basis according to the requirement of the crop. Keep the greenhouse temperature at 21oC day and 19oC night, ventilating at 27oC, for the first two months of cropping. These are ideal temperatures; if not possible, try to average 16oC, and avoid cold draughts as cucumbers are susceptible.

Training

There are three basic methods of training; vertical cordons, oblique cordons and arch training. As for tomatoes, twist the stems round a vertical polypropylene twine attached around the base (neck) of the plant and to an overhead wire. Remove all side shoots and flowers from the bottom 20cm of the plant. As new side-shoots appear, stop at two leaves after the flower. Allow longer side shoots higher up the plant.

Pests and diseases to look out for

Aphids

Red Spider Mite

Sciarid Fly

Whitefly

Eelworm

Slugs and snails

Black root rot

Grey Mould (botrytis)

Black stem rot

Gummosis (grow resistant varieties)

Powdery mildew

Anthracnose (leaf spot) (grow resistant varieties)

Verticillium wilt

Cucumber mosaic virus

Use sticky traps to help monitor for signs of pest build up. Use biological methods where feasible. For advice on chemical control, consult your agrochemical supplier.

Information provided for guidance only, as cultural practices and climatic circumstances vary.