

GROWING CUCUMBER PLANTS

Cucumbers basically come in two different types the outdoor and the greenhouse variety and how and where you grow them depends upon which type you are growing. Outdoor cucumbers are, fairly obviously, hardier plants than the greenhouse varieties and a majority of the outdoor cucumbers will grow shorter fruit which will tend to have a rougher skin than the greenhouse plants. This however does not have any effect on the taste of the fruits as we find that both types are as tasty as each other. What we do find is that cucumbers grown 'at home' are well worth the effort as they are much tastier than the ones bought in a shop.



What is the best position for my cucumber plants?

Cucumbers are climbing plants however they are also quite happy to be allowed to trail along the ground (as with the Carosello Tondo pictured below) just like courgettes and many other Squash varieties. Generally speaking the cucumbers that are allowed to climb will produce better fruits as they are being formed away from the ground, therefore many of the little beasties that like to feast upon them, and they will see more of the sunshine. Allowing your cucumbers to climb will also take up far less space which is definitely something worth considering when planning your garden as the space they will want to take can be quite considerable if you are not hard with the plants and keep pinching them out. If you are going to allow your cucumber plants to climb then a simple 'wigwam' made from canes, wooden trellis or just wires will suffice. Make sure they are sturdy enough for the plant and position them in such a way that you are able to gain access to pick your fruit. This is something that is all too easily forgotten.



Cucumber seeds need a temperature of around 20°C to give good germination. This should not be too much of a problem for greenhouse growers but for the outside cucumbers you are going to have to find a sheltered, warm and sunny position. You may also wish to warm the soil if planting outside this can be done by simply covering the ground with black plastic for a few days or why not grow your cucumbers in a raised bed or large plant pot. As the cucumber is around 96% water you do need to ensure they are watered once the fruits start to form. To help with this plant in soil that has organic matter within it as this will help with water retention within the soil.

Sowing your cucumber seed

Greenhouse varieties should be sown in early spring and outdoor varieties a couple of weeks later. Seedlings can then be planted outside in late spring (around the start of May) once they have been hardened slightly. This means taking the seedlings outside during the daytime but returning to the greenhouse in the evening. This time allows the seedlings to start getting used to wind and rain but protect from frosts and very cold winds. Sow your cucumber seeds around 2cm deep, lightly cover and keep the soil moist. Warmth is the most important things with cucumber plants so the warmer you can keep the pots the better. When transplanting your seedlings you need to give the plants some space so we do not recommend planting closer than 15cm to each other. Remember that they like some organic matter in the soil which will help with water retention and feeding.



Harvesting & Maintenance

As we said earlier never let your cucumbers dry out, keep the soil constantly moist. Little and often with the watering is better than a good soak and then nothing for a few days. Pinch out the growing tips to get a bushier plant and to train it where you want it to grow. Harvest the fruit when it is ready! Don't pick too soon but the younger fruit will have the tastier flesh. Greenhouse cucumbers are normally ready from July onwards with the outdoor fruit normally 2-3 weeks later and running right through until early autumn.

Most importantly of all ENJOY!