

Apparently cucumbers are 95% water, contain just 16 calories per 4oz serving, have 1% vitamin A, 2% vitamin C & 11 % vitamin K plus quite a few other vitamins too numerous to mention. It also contains a minuscule amount of sugar and calories so you won't be getting fat on a cucumber diet, which is probably why these fruits are called a super food.

Lots of interesting facts but the one that concerns me is that they taste great in a salmon and cucumber sandwich, which is a really good reason for growing them.

Cucumbers can sometimes be ticklish to grow successfully but obey a few basic rules and you will meet with success.

I don't grow my cucumbers in a heated greenhouse which means I delay sowing the seed until mid March. I can then plant out into a cold greenhouse in early May when the overnight temperature is maintained at around 50f. For fruiting the plants will require a temperature closer to 70f to be successful. You will need to adjust the timings to suit your particular area.

Many years ago before F1 seed became widely available we grew the true varieties 'Telegraph' and 'King George'. Telegraph especially had a great flavour, and because of its long length and smooth skin was a favourite on the show bench. The downside was that as a true variety it would set male flowers as well as female. This was a pain to us gardeners as each day we had to pick off all the male flowers. If we left just one a pollinating insect would surely enter the greenhouse and transfer pollen from a male to a female flower, 'disaster', with the plant pollinated cucumber production would grind to a halt and all the subsequent cucumbers produced on that particular plant would probably taste bitter.

Thank goodness for the introduction of F1 cucumber seed. Now the first thing I would say to all budding vegetables growers is forget the true varieties of cucumber, pay the price and buy F1s - you won't regret it. The main reason for doing this is your F1s will only produce female flowers unless you put them under stress, then occasionally you will get a male flower. These are easily recognisable as there is no embryo cucumber visible behind the flower.

Time to sow

At the beginning of the season you only need to sow a couple of seeds as after that you can take side cuttings from your plants to keep production going all year, right up to the frosts.

Fill 4" pots half full with Levington's F2S seed compost. Insert the seed on edge about 1" deep. Give them a drink of warm water and place them into a plastic bag. Now they



need somewhere warm to germinate. I use our airing cupboard. I place the pots on a seed tray with a layer of newspaper underneath. In three days they will have germinated. 'This never fails'. Sometimes it takes until the evening of the third day for them all to emerge.

The photo is a bit fuzzy but you can see the germinated cucumbers. 'Time to top up the pots with more compost, this time using Levingtons M2. This contains a higher concentration of fertiliser and will keep the plants ticking over for a month or so.

Once topped up keep the plants warm and in a position of good light. Plant out into bottomless pots once your greenhouse conditions are suitable.



Work in plenty of well rotted manure into the greenhouse border. Set the pots up 2' apart and fill with Levington's M3 compost.

As soon as the plants can be seen making new growth, commence feeding once per week with a high

nitrogen fertiliser. Vitax 301 or Chempak No 2 are suitable products as these also contain trace elements.

Notice the way I tie the main stem to the canes. I use biodegradable string. It is first tied securely around the cane and then tied under a leaf joint on the main stem. The reason for this is that the weight of cucumbers can drag the stem down and you could end up with a stem that looks something like a zig zag.

By growing in pots like this you will avoid one of the worse diseases of cucumbers, 'Stem Rot'. This is caused by too much moisture around the base of the stem. The ring culture method wicks excessive moisture away & solves the problem. This is the method I always employ for growing my cucumbers.

The ideal conditions for growing the plants are shade, warmth and high humidity. As the temperature rises, in order to maintain high



humidity I spray with water the floor and back wall of my lean-to greenhouse every morning and also midday 'if I am around'.

In these conditions growth will be rapid. I place a bamboo cane in each pot. These are secured to overhead wires and the cues are trained up these, eventually filling the whole greenhouse with cucumbers hanging down.



As the plants grow they will throw a multitude of side shoots. These should be cut off as the plant can only cope with so many fruits at any one time. Thin out the fruits regularly and remove any mature cucumbers. If you have a glut they can be stored in a fridge for up to three weeks, if you first wrap them up in several layers of cling film.

It is bad practice to leave all the fruits on the plant, as it will just react by aborting most of them.

Retain some of the side shoots to raise as cuttings and thereby maintain production through the whole season by replacing the old plants with the new, once the old stop fruiting.

Cutting a suitable side shoot.



Trim to 4 to 6 inches long and remove all the unwanted foliage leaving the growing point and one side leaf. Put the cuttings into a jar of clean water and change it every three days. You should see roots forming on the stem within two weeks. Pot on into 3" pots of Levington's F2S compost.

Cucumbers are not too bothered by pests. But sometimes the fruits are nibbled by woodlice and small snails. Not a big problem for the kitchen gardener but a pain for those wanting to exhibit in a show. One way around the problem is to put a good

layer of coffee grounds around the surface of the pots. This certainly puts the pests off and also provides extra nitrogen.

One major disease that cucumbers suffer is mildew on the leaves. This can easily be cured by spraying the plants with 'Gold Top'

Jersey milk. The high fat content in the milk actually dissolves the mildew. 'Sometimes it does smell a bit'. Once dissolved, the milk can be washed off.



Do this three days after spraying.



So the golden basic rules are, grow F1 plants, keep excessive moisture away from the stem, feed all season with a high nitrogen fertiliser, and grow in warmth, shade and high humidity.