



URI COLLEGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND LIFE SCIENCES (CELS) OUTREACH CENTER

3 East Alumni Avenue  
Kingston, Rhode Island 02881

**For more information:**

**Call:**

In RI: URI MGA Hotline  
1-800-448-1011  
Mon.-Thurs. 9:00 a.m.—2:00 p.m.

In MA and CT: 401-874-2900

Outside New England please contact Cooperative Extension in your county.

**Websites:**

URI Master Gardener Association  
[www.urimga.org](http://www.urimga.org)

CELS Outreach Center  
[www.uri.edu/cels/ceo](http://www.uri.edu/cels/ceo)

## CUCUMBERS

Cucumbers, grown either for pickling or slicing, have become one of the most popular planted crops in today's home garden. Although cucumbers require substantial growing space, they can be grown in small gardens by training vines onto trellises, or they can be grown in containers. The cucumber ranges in size from the small gherkin type to the long, thin slicing variety. There are also yellow and fruited varieties.

Vines bear two kinds of flowers, pistillate (female) and staminate (male). The first flowers, which are staminate, drop from the vine and do not bear fruit. Subsequent flowers include both male and female, and pollination can occur. Plants bearing female flowers are also available. The seed packet will have specifically marked seeds indicating that the marked seeds must be planted as well for proper pollination.

### Climate Requirements

Cucumbers are a subtropical crop, requiring long, warm days, plenty of sunshine, and balmy nights. Many new varieties have shorter growing seasons, making them ideal for the shorter summers in the Northeast. Cucumbers thrive at relatively high temperatures; 65-75°F is the ideal temperature range. The plants do not tolerate frost. As a fast-growing crop, cucumbers require a substantial amount of moisture and plant nutrient elements throughout the growing season.

### Soils

Cucumbers can be grown successfully in many types of soils, but they will be most successful in loose, well-drained soil that is well supplied with organic matter and plant nutrient elements. Work in organic matter such as well-rotted manure or compost before planting. The soil pH should be between 6.0 and 7.0.

### Fertilizers

Lime and fertilizers are best applied using soil test results as a guide. Prior to planting, you should add a complete fertilizer such as 5-10-10 or similar analysis according to label recommendations. One week after blossoming begins, and again three weeks later, use a high nitrogen fertilizer to side-dress the hills. Do not over-fertilize, as this encourages vine growth and retards fruiting.

PESTICIDES ARE POISONOUS!! Read and follow all safety precautions on labels. Handle carefully and store in original containers out of reach of children, pets, or livestock. Dispose of empty containers immediately, in a safe manner and place. Pesticides should never be stored with foods or in areas where people eat.

When trade names are used for identification, no product endorsement is implied, nor is discrimination intended against similar materials. Be sure that the pesticide that you wish to use is registered in the state of use.

The user of this information assumes all risk for personal injury or property damage.

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Rhode Island Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities. U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.



**Note:** The Hotline is open Monday—Thursday, 9:00 a.m.—2:00 p.m. from March 1 to November 1.

## **Establishing the Planting**

You can gain growing time by starting the plants indoors 10 to 14 days before anticipated planting time. Use peat pots or pellets and avoid disturbing roots when transplanting. Planting outside should be delayed until the danger of frost has passed in the spring – usually late May in southern New England. Cucumber seeds can be planted in hills consisting of four or five seeds per hill spaced at 4 to 5 feet apart. Certain varieties make excellent container plants.

## **Cultural Practices**

Mulches conserve soil moisture, prevent soil compaction and rotting of the fruit, and help suppress weeds. Black plastic mulch can be a valuable aid in keeping the soil moist and minimizing weed problems. Organic mulches such as peat moss, cocoa shells, or buckwheat hulls also work well, providing the added bonus of improving the soil.

Weeds, insects, and diseases must be controlled in the planting. Cucumber beetles, aphids, mites, pickle worms, bacterial wilt, anthracnose, powdery and downy mildews, and angular leaf spot are potential problems in the cucumber planting. Early and continuous control of the cucumber beetle is critical to success in growing cucumbers. The cucumber beetle can infect the plant with bacterial wilt as early as when seedlings are just emerging from the ground. Bacterial wilt causes plants to wilt and die. Avoid using insecticides in the garden when pollinating insects are working the flowers.

## **Harvesting**

Cucumbers are ready for harvest 50 to 70 days from planting. Harvest according to size depending on intended use. Cucumbers become bitter if they are allowed to grow until they begin to turn yellowish. Harvest by cutting the stem 1/4-inch above the fruit. Frequent picking of cucumbers is essential as they grow and reach optimum quality. Delayed harvest results in reduced quality products and less productive plants. Fruiting is an exhaustive process for the plant.

*Adapted from Pamela J. Bennett, Ohio State University Extension, 2000*