

CUCUMBERS



INTRODUCTION

Cucumbers are thought to have originated in Southern Asia and were very popular in India. They eventually spread to Europe, where for thousands of years they were used to quench thirst. Cucumbers are very popular in salads. Related to the watermelon it is easy to see why their watery flesh makes them so refreshing.

Cool as a cucumber is not just a catchy phrase, the pulp temperature can be up to 10°C cooler than the air temperature! In New Zealand we can buy several varieties of cucumber.

TYPES

Telegraph cucumber

This is the most popular cucumber and is grown under glass. It is long, usually about 30–45cm, and is often individually wrapped in plastic. This is because it has a very soft skin that is easily damaged. The plastic also stops it drying out and going soft. Telegraph cucumbers are often referred to as seedless as, when harvested at their best, the seeds are immature or virtually nonexistent.

Short cucumber

It is short and has a slightly uneven surface. Grown indoors all year round, it can also be grown outdoors in the summer. The skin on a standard cucumber is tougher than a telegraph cucumber and is often peeled.

Apple cucumber

It is pale yellow and round, crisp like an apple and with a very mild sweet flavour.

Gherkin

Is very small, between 5–10cm long, and is grown only for pickling.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

The best cucumbers will have a firm skin and an even colour. The shade of the cucumber is important with telegraph and short cucumbers, a vibrant green colour assures the buyer that the cucumbers have recently come from the vine, whilst a dull green or yellow indicates age.

HOW TO KEEP

Store at 10-12°C with a relative humidity of 90-98%. Lower temperatures will cause chilling damage. Cucumbers are ethylene sensitive which means they should be stored separately from ethylene producing products.

Consumer Storage: Store in the warmest place in the fridge, use promptly. In cooler weather it is safe to store at room temperature.

NUTRITIONAL VALUE

Cucumbers are a good source of vitamin C. They also supply fibre, especially with the skin on.

HOW TO PREPARE

Young cucumbers have a mild and tender skin and it's unnecessary to peel them. Telegraph cucumbers never need to be peeled. Many European recipe books advocate peeling and removing the seeds, but in New Zealand the whole cucumber is usually enjoyed.

WAYS TO EAT THIS VEGETABLE

Cucumbers are most popular as a salad vegetable, but they can be prepared in a surprising number of other ways. They make an excellent cold soup. They can also be peeled and chopped and then sauteed to serve with fish. Cucumbers can be hollowed out and filled with a savoury filling which depending on the type of filling may be either eaten raw, microwaved or baked. Cucumber is a great addition to pickles or chutneys.

WHEN YOU CAN GET IT

Available all year round. Short and apple cucumbers are most plentiful in the summer months.

TIPS FOR RETAILING

Display different varieties together on refrigerated shelving. Ensure that the temperature does not fall below 5°C as chilling injury will occur.