

## Kinds of Cukes

Botanists classify cucumbers as fruit because they contain seeds. But for culinary and nutritional purposes, cucumbers are considered vegetables.

Peak cucumber season is from May to August, but they can be found at your market year-round. You'll know when cucumbers are ripe when they are firm (but not hard), unwrinkled, and have vibrant, darker green skin. Avoid cucumbers that are bruised, have soft spots, are mushy, discolored, shriveled, or without their skin intact.

Some of the most popular types of cucumber you'll come across in America are garden (American), English, Persian, and Kirby.

Cucumbers that fall into two categories: slicing (for eating fresh) or pickling. Slicers are generally smooth-skinned, while pickling cucumbers are rough and warty. Sometimes listed as a third type are "Burpless" cucumbers, which are cucumbers bred not to cause tummy upsets that result in burping.

Each cucumber variety has its own taste and texture, so knowing when to use which type is key. Here's how to identify the most common types of cucumbers.

The garden cucumber is around 8-10 inches long and characterized by thick dark skin and large seeds. The skin can be both tough and bitter and is usually coated in wax when sold in the supermarket. Therefore, it's usually suggested that you peel this kind of cucumber before using it.

English cucumbers are the variety that's usually sold wrapped in plastic in supermarkets. They are longer and thinner than a garden cucumber. The delicate English cucumber is crisp rather than crunchy, with a sweet, mild flavor and no bitterness. What makes it such a great eating cucumber is that it has thin, edible skin and very few seeds, so it can be used without any preparation.

Persian cucumbers are a smaller version of the English cucumber. They may also be sold as mini cucumbers or Lebanese cucumbers, often in packs. They're usually around 5 to 6 inches long, with thin, edible skin and few, if any, seeds.

Kirby cucumbers come in a wide range of colors, from yellow to dark green, but are easily identifiable by their small size and knobby skin. This little cuke should be your go-to when looking for a cucumber for home pickling.

Proper storage is crucial in preserving cucumbers' signature crunch, clean taste, and nutritional value. Without it, cucumbers become soft, slimy, and moldy.

### Step 1: Clean the Cucumbers

Gently rinse the cucumbers in cool running water to remove any dirt or debris. Pat completely dry with a clean towel, as moisture can expedite their spoilage.

### Step 2: Wrap Up the Cucumbers

Wrap each cucumber in a paper towel and place them together in a zip-top bag. The paper towels essentially create a barrier that wicks away the moisture that leads to decay, allowing the cucumbers to last far longer than normal, typically 10 to 12 days. Store this bag in the warmest zone of your refrigerator, like the door or upper shelves.

### Step 3: Check Periodically

Check on your cucumbers periodically and remove any cucumbers that show signs of decay.

As cucumbers mature, the seeds grow larger and become more bitter, so you may want to remove the seeds.

Due to the high water content of cucumbers, the calorie content and concentration of nutrients are low. A half cup of sliced cucumber, with the peel, provides 8 calories. They contain vitamin K, vitamin C, and potassium.

I encourage you to seek out the many varieties of cucumbers available and enjoy their unique and refreshing qualities, enjoying them however you like.