



# Vegetables for Wellness: Kentucky Cucumbers

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From July through September, Kentuckians can enjoy the freshness and flavor of delicious locally grown cucumbers that have been picked at their peak. Slicing and pickling cucumbers are the most commonly grown. The cucumber is a member of the gourd family and originated thousands of years ago in either India or Thailand. The Spaniards introduced the cucumber to the Native Americans. The phrase “cool as a cucumber” came about because the cucumber’s interior flesh is 20 degrees cooler than the outside air temperature on a hot summer’s day, making it cool to eat.

*Vegetable Cultivars for Kentucky Gardens* (ID-133), a publication by the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service, has more information on varieties that are successful in Kentucky. It can be viewed at [www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/agpubs.htm](http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/agpubs.htm).

## Nutrition Facts

Cucumbers are naturally high in water but contain few other nutrients. One-half cup of sliced cucumbers has only seven calories. Since most of the fiber and a small amount of beta-carotene are present in the cucumber skin, you may choose to leave cucumbers unpeeled. The calorie and sodium content of pickled cucumbers depends on the pickling method.

## Selection

Choose firm, fully green cucumbers with no yellowing or soft spots. Slicing cucumbers that are 6 to 9 inches in length are well suited for eating. The small white spines on their surface rub off easily. One- to 4-inch cucumbers are preferred for pickling. Pickling cucumbers have small black spines on the surface. The varieties that are used for pickling are less prone to bloating or developing a hollow interior during the pickling process. For cucumbers at the farmers’ market nearest you, check the Web at [www.ca.uky.edu/gardenbasket](http://www.ca.uky.edu/gardenbasket).



## Storage

Cucumbers should be harvested early in the morning. They may be refrigerated, unwashed, in a moisture-proof bag for up to 1 week. Sliced cucumbers should be tightly wrapped, refrigerated, and used within 3 days. Pickling cucumbers should be used immediately.

## Preparation

Cucumbers are inexpensive in season and lend themselves to both hot and cold dishes. Always wash fresh cucumbers in cool running water, wiping off visible signs of dirt. Cucumbers are normally eaten when they are immature and the seeds are edible and surrounded by a mild, crisp flesh. As a cucumber matures, the seeds grow larger and more bitter, so the seeds of older cucumbers need to be removed. Simply slice the cucumber lengthwise and scoop out the seeds with a spoon. For pickling, follow your recipe instructions. Three to 4 pounds of cucumbers will yield about 5 to 6 pints of pickles. Pickling instructions are outlined in the UK Cooperative Extension publication *Preparing and Canning Fermented Foods and Pickled Vegetables* (FCS 3-333). This publication is available on the Web at [www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/hepubs.htm](http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/hepubs.htm) or from your local Cooperative Extension office.

Soak cucumbers in salt water for use in salads. This prevents the cucumbers from losing their water content, which will dilute salad dressing. Cucumbers have a natural affinity for dill, mint, and parsley, so these herbs make good flavorings.

**Scandinavian salad:** Slice cucumbers as thinly as possible and sprinkle them with a little sugar, salt, rice vinegar, and fresh minced dill. This crisp salad is great with grilled salmon or lamb.

**Cucumbers in sour cream:** Toss paper-thin cucumber slices with sour cream that has been flavored with grated horseradish or minced garlic and chives. Cucumbers may also be tossed with yogurt or with buttermilk dressing.

**Greek salad:** Layer thinly sliced cucumber, tomato, red onion, and fresh basil leaves on a platter. Crumble feta cheese on top and drizzle with vinaigrette. Serve with leg of lamb.

**Russian salad:** Combine equal amounts of thinly sliced cucumbers and radishes. Sprinkle with fresh dill, thinly sliced scallions, and ground pepper. Cover and refrigerate for up to 2 hours before serving. Mix yogurt and sour cream together and toss with the salad.

**Cucumber dip:** Place 1 peeled cucumber, 32 ounces of nonfat plain yogurt, 4 cloves of garlic, and 1/2 cup of walnut pieces in a food processor. Pulse until the mixture is combined and chunky. Place in a bowl and fold in 1/4-cup olive oil, a thinly sliced scallion, 1/4 cup chopped fresh dill, and 1/4 teaspoon each of salt and pepper. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour before serving. Perfect with unsalted tortilla chips or baked pita chips.

**Herbed cucumbers:** Add a squeeze of lemon and a dash of minced fresh dill, tarragon, mint, or chives to sautéed cucumbers. For a creamier dish, add low-fat milk and reduce the liquid over medium heat until it is thick. Whisk in a dab of sour cream after you take the cucumbers off the heat.

Cooked cucumbers can be appealing when sautéed with a delicate fish, such as sole or turbot, or with chicken. Many Asian dishes call for steamed or sautéed cucumbers that are then eaten as a side vegetable.

## Sweet Freezer Pickles

**2 quarts cucumbers, peeled and thinly sliced**  
**1 medium onion, thinly sliced**  
**1 tablespoon salt**  
**1 1/2 cups sugar**  
**1/2 cup white distilled vinegar**

Mix cucumbers, onions, and salt in a large bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Allow to sit at room temperature for 2 hours. Drain. Combine sugar and vinegar, stir well, and pour over cucumbers. Pack into pint freezer containers or zip-closure bags and freeze immediately. Pickles are ready to eat in 3 to 4 days. May be frozen for up to 1 year. *Nutritional analysis (per pint): 223 calories, 1 g protein, 56 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 5 mg sodium.* Yield: 5 to 6 pints.

—From University of Illinois Extension.

## Dilled Cucumber Salad

**2 peeled and seeded cucumbers, diagonally sliced**  
**2 tablespoons sugar**  
**1/4 apple cider vinegar**  
**Salt, to taste**  
**Ground black pepper, to taste**  
**2 tablespoons fresh dill, chopped**

Place the cucumbers in a bowl. In a small bowl, stir the sugar, salt, and vinegar together. Toss with the cucumbers. Add pepper and dill. Serve immediately or store covered in the refrigerator for up to 4 hours. *Nutritional analysis per serving: 19 calories, 5 g carbohydrate, 1 g fat, 76 mg sodium.* Yield: 8 1/4-cup servings.

## Cucumber Sauce

**2 peeled and seeded cucumbers, cut into 1/2-inch pieces**  
**1/2 teaspoon salt**  
**3 tablespoons margarine**  
**3/4 cup lowfat milk**  
**2 tablespoons mixture of fresh parsley, chives, and dill, finely minced**

Sprinkle cucumbers with salt and allow them to drain for 30 minutes over a bowl. Rinse and pat dry. Heat the margarine in a heavy skillet. Add cucumbers and sauté 3 to 4 minutes, or until lightly browned. Do not overcook. Carefully add the milk and cook until it heavily coats a spoon. Spoon over roast chicken just before serving and then sprinkle it with the herb mixture. *Nutritional analysis per serving (for sauce only): 113 calories, 2 g protein, 5 g carbohydrate, 1 g fiber, 10 g fat, 413 mg sodium.* Yield: 4 servings.

# Indonesian Salsa

**2 cups pineapple, diced into 1/4-inch pieces**  
**2 cups peeled and seeded cucumbers, diced into 1/4-inch pieces**  
**1/2 red onion, diced into 1/4-inch pieces**  
**1 teaspoon red chili pepper, minced**  
**1 teaspoon garlic, minced**  
**2 teaspoons lime zest, finely grated**  
**1/2 cup lime juice**  
**2 tablespoons basil leaves, finely slivered**  
**2 tablespoons, cilantro, coarsely chopped**

Combine the pineapple, cucumber, and onion in a bowl. Add chili pepper, garlic, lime zest, and lime juice. Cover and refrigerate for up to 2 hours before use. Toss in basil and cilantro just before serving. Serve with tortilla or pita chips. *Nutritional analysis per serving: 30 calories, 1 g protein, 8 g carbohydrate, 1 g fiber, 2 mg sodium.* Yield: 8 1/2-cup servings.

*Note: Handle hot chili peppers with gloved hands.*

For additional in-season recipes, check the home page of Family and Consumer Sciences Extension on the Web site of the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture at [www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/fcs/](http://www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/fcs/).

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