8 Varieties of Cucumber to Grow
Cucumbers are a great summer vegetable crop. Their crisp, cool flavour and relatively high water content mean that picking a ripe cucumber from the vine on a hot day and adding to a salad or a sandwich is a real pleasure. But cucumbers can be enjoyed all year round with some varieties lending themselves particularly well to pickling. This vegetable originated in India over 4000 years ago, but today it is cultivated on farms and in gardens around the world. Permaculturists have a wide variety of cultivars to choose from. However, there are varieties of cucumber that are easy to grow and require similar growing conditions and care.

Almost all cucumber species prefer a position in full sunlight. However, they do not do so well if that means constant high temperatures, above 90 degrees Fahrenheit or so. If you are in a climate with consistently high temperatures in the summer, consider planting in a location that affords partial shade for part of the day. Cucumbers are relatively low-lying crops, so can be planted next to some taller species to achieve this microclimate modification. Cucumbers also need quite a lot of water. The soil, particularly when the plants are flowering and fruiting, should be kept damp. A deep watering once or twice a week may be necessary, depending on the local climate conditions. Regularly watering is important as all because cucumbers like well-drained friable soil. A rich layer of humus in the topsoil is ideal, so compost the soil well before planting. This will also help to keep the pH level of the soil balanced around neutral, which aids cucumber plant growth. You can also mulch your cucumbers to help preserve water, suppress weeds that will compete with them for soil moisture and nutrients, and provide extra nutritional benefit to the soil. Porous mulch like straw is preferable to allow moisture percolation and soil aeration. Being vine crops, you also need to provide the cucumber plants something to grow up. A trellis is ideal, but individual canes can work too. The main thing is to ensure that the fruits do not hang on the ground as this will inhibit growth and promote spoiling. Growing cucumbers up a trellis or fence also makes them easier to harvest for the gardener.

You might also consider companion planting your cucumbers. They do well in proximity to radishes, peas, beans and carrots, while dill and nasturtiums help keep potential pest insects away and help deter weeds. Cucumbers do not do so well if planted near sage or potatoes.
So, having determined the right spot to plant your cucumbers and prepared the soil with lots of organic matter, it’s just a question of which variety to plant. Here are some of the more common species that are easy to grow in most conditions.

**Marketmore 86**
There are a few different varieties of the Marketmore. The Marketmore 97 and the 80 are also good choices for the permaculture gardener, but the 86 is particularly renowned for its high levels of productivity and for being very disease resistant. They can do well even if you have mild summers, producing firm, dark-skinned fruit approximately six to eight inches long. Renowned for their lack of bitterness, they are best used fresh in salads.

**Orient Express**
The Orient Express is one of the most popular ‘burpless’ varieties of cucumber. These are varieties that contain lower levels of a chemical compound called cucurbitacins, which can make the vegetable taste bitter (other varieties that contain higher levels of this compound should not become bitter as long as the growing conditions remain favorable and the crop is not left on the plant too long). The Orient Express has one of the longest growing times, with the crop typically ready for harvest 64 days after planting, but the rewards of waiting are a crisp and crunchy fruit between 12 and 14 inches long. Renowned for their lack of bitterness, they are best used fresh in salads.

**Amira**
The Amira is a Middle Eastern variety of cucumber, which like the Orient Express is considered burpless. They have a relatively sweet taste, partly due to the fact that they are best harvested when quite small, typically between four and five inches in length. You should be able to harvest around 55 days after planting.

**Lemon**
So named because its fruits bear a passing resemblance to the citrus fruit of the same name, Lemon cucumbers are ideal for pickling, with a crisp, mild flavor that takes on the attributes of the pickling spices. The Lemon is also a good choice because it is an heirloom species.

**Greensleeves**
The Greensleeves variety is fast-growing – with harvest possible around 53 days after planting – and productive, with a large crop of dark-green cylindrical fruits, about 8 inches in length when ready to go. They also have a smaller seed cavity than many other species, and it is thought that seeds can, if growing conditions are not optimal, contribute to a bitter taste in cucumbers.

**Armenian**
If you have relatively hot weather in the summer, the Armenian could be a good option for your permaculture plot. Also known as the snake melon, the Armenian grows long slender light green fruits about 12 inches in length. They have a mild flavor with a hint of citrus.

**Salad Bush**
The Salad Bush variety is a dwarf plant, so is ideal for container growing, meaning permaculturists who have limited space,
even just a courtyard or balcony, can grow cucumbers, as long as their property receives sufficient sunlight [although the benefit of container growing is that you can move the pot around to make the most of the available sun]. A very tasty, slicing cucumber that is ready to harvest at around 8 inches long, the Salad Bush can produce high yields even in limited space.

**Pickle Bush**

Also suitable for container gardening, or for plots that have limited space, is the Pickle Bush. As the name suggests, its fruit is ideal for pickling, with a robust squat shape – around 4 inches long when mature – and a crisp, light flavor. The fruit is dark green with pal green stripes along its length.