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Plants on Your Plate

Cucumbers are a popular summer vegetable that many people include in their garden or market basket. A high water content member of the squash family, cucumbers are about 96% water, which makes them a very low calorie food – about 8 calories per half cup. They are also low in sodium, and are good sources of potassium, magnesium, vitamin K and fiber. Potassium is a nutrient that is important in maintaining healthy blood pressure, while magnesium and Vitamin K play a role in bone health. The type of fiber in cucumbers is beneficial in both digestive and cardiovascular health and helps to create a feeling of satiety. Since most of the nutrients are in the skin, eating cucumbers with the peel provides the most nutritional benefit.

There are two main types of cucumbers: slicing and pickling types. The most common slicing cucumbers are standard garden cucumbers. These cucumbers have larger, soft, edible seeds, however, some people choose to remove them. To retain moisture, food processors often coat the skin of the cucumber with food grade wax. English or Persian cucumbers, also slicing cucumbers, are sometimes referred to as gourmet, 'burpless', or seedless cucumbers. These varieties are longer and thinner than standard cucumbers, have seeds that are very small, and are usually shrink-wrapped to seal in moisture. Slicing cucumbers range in size from 7 to 12 inches or longer depending on variety.

Pickling cucumbers tend to be smaller, with a thinner, often bumpy skin. Gherkins are one of the most common pickling cucumber and their small 3-4 inch size makes them perfect for whole pickles. Kirby cucumbers grow to be 5-6 inches and are good for pickling or snacking whole. Standard garden cucumbers can be used for pickling, particularly for relish, however because burpless cucumbers result in a less desirable finished product, they are not recommended for pickling.

Making cucumbers into pickles is either a quick process, that takes a few hours or a fermentation process, which takes several days to weeks. When choosing a pickling method, be sure to select a method that uses current research methods, since food preservation recommendations, as well as plant varieties have changed in recent years. If you are uncertain of where to look for canning methods, you might start with University of Missouri Extension's *Seasonal and Simple* website, <https://seasonalandsimple.info/> that will guide you to proper steps for preserving foods safely. This is also available as an app for both IOS and Android. You can also contact University of Missouri Extension for information on upcoming food preservation classes.

When selecting cucumbers, choose slender, firm, green produce without wrinkles or soft spots. For optimal freshness, store unwashed for up to one week in a moisture proof bag. As with all fresh produce, wash before preparation and serving. Adding white vinegar to water and soaking cucumbers for five minutes prior to a gentle scrub with a vegetable brush can help dissolve any wax used in commercial processing. To remove the seeds, if desired, cut the cucumber in half lengthwise and scoop the seeds with a teaspoon.

Cucumbers make a delicious crunchy snack – with or without a dip – or a tasty addition to a salad. The recipe below combines vibrant colors, textures and flavors and is a wonderful way to add cucumbers to your plate!

Cucumber Blueberry Salad

Vinaigrette

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons white balsamic (or other) vinegar
1 tablespoon lime juice, freshly squeezed or bottled
1 teaspoon sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon pepper

Salad

1 cup fresh blueberries
1 medium English cucumber, cut into small chunks
4 cups fresh arugula
1/4 medium red onion, thinly sliced
1/4 cup crumbled reduced-fat Feta cheese
2 tablespoons coarsely chopped walnuts, toasted
4 slices whole grain bread

Directions

1. In a small bowl whisk together vinaigrette ingredients.
2. Cut bread into cubes and toast in a 400 degree oven for 10 minutes or until lightly browned. Set aside.
3. In a large bowl mix together all salad ingredients.
4. When ready to serve, add vinaigrette to salad and toss.
5. Add croutons just before serving.

Makes 4 servings

Calories: 212, Total Fat: 10 g, Saturated Fat: 3 g, Cholesterol: 8 mg, Sodium: 368 mg,
Total Carbohydrate: 24 g, Dietary Fiber: 4 g, Total Sugars: 10 g, Added Sugar: 2g
Protein: 7 g

Recipe from USDA Mixing Bowl



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