

# CUCUMBERS

Educator | VermontHarvestoftheMonth.org

Harvest of the Month provides resources for the cafeteria, classroom, and community to promote the use of local, seasonal foods.



## History of Cucumbers

A member of the Cucurbit family, cucumbers are related to squash (winter and summer) as well as melons and gourds. The cucumber was first cultivated in India over 3,000 years ago. The Greeks and Romans spread the cucumber to Europe. It first arrived in North America in the 16th century. Nowadays, China produces the most cucumbers.

## Fun Facts

- Cucumbers are 95% water!
- Cucumbers are one of the oldest cultivated vegetables, originally from south Asia
- There can be a 20 degree difference between the inside of a cucumber and its outside skin, which might be where the phrase “cool as a cucumber” comes from!

## Reading Corner

» *A Fruit is a Suitcase for Seeds*, by Jean Richards

## Varieties of Cucumbers

It may surprise you that cucumbers come in a number of varieties, including: Armenian, Diva, English Telegraph, Lemon, and Green Burpless. Differences between varieties include skin thickness, size, seedless or with seeds and varying color from yellow to dark green.

## Benefits

Cucumbers are very hydrating vegetables that help replenish the fluids and minerals lost in our perspiration. They also contain Vitamin E, which is great for our skin. Try rubbing a slice on your face to experience their refreshing benefits! Cucumbers also have a high water and high fiber content which aids in digestion.

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## CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

### **History/Social Studies** | Food Preservation

Supplies needed:

Cucumbers (at least 1 per student), cutting boards, knives/crinkle cutters, water, vinegar, sugar, salt, pickling spices, garlic (optional), jar or other container, saucepan, mixing spoon, burner/hot plate.

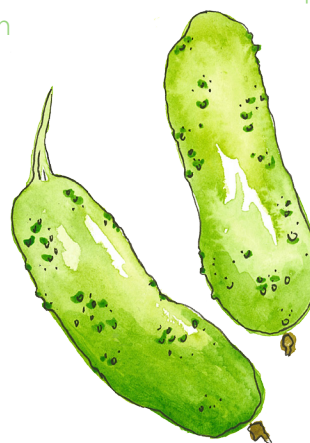
Guiding Questions/Discussion:

1. How did people keep their food from going bad before refrigerators were invented? How could people enjoy cucumbers (and other fruits/veggies) after the growing season was over (i.e. what if they wanted cucumbers in December?)?
2. Explain to your students that people had to come up with creative ways to preserve foods so that they could eat fruits and veggies (and meat) when winter came. Discuss what the word "preserve" means.
3. Popular food preservation techniques are canning, drying, making jam/jelly, and pickling! After having a discussion with your class about all of these types of preservation and identifying examples of each, make some pickles of your own!

Directions:

1. Ask each student to slice a cucumber (into rounds or spears). If needed, go through some knife safety tips first.
2. Make a quick brine by heating equal parts water & vinegar on the stove and dissolving  $\frac{1}{4}$  part sugar and a tablespoon or two of salt into the liquid (you can do this ahead of time).
3. Place cucumber slices into a jar or other container (add other pickling spices and/or garlic if you want).
4. Pour in enough brine in to cover cucumbers.
5. Place in refrigerator for at least 24 hours and have a taste test the next day!

Follow this link for helpful information on food preservation and other lesson ideas: [www.history.org/history/teaching/enewsletter/volume5/september06/teachstrategy.cfm](http://www.history.org/history/teaching/enewsletter/volume5/september06/teachstrategy.cfm)



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### **Math** | Measuring Madness

Supplies needed:

Various-sized cucumbers, measuring devices (ruler, string, and scale), and handout for recording measurements

Directions:

1. Place a few cucumbers at each table.
2. Ask students to measure the length, width, diameter, circumference, radius, and weight of their cucumbers and record their findings.
3. As a class, make various charts to compare and contrast the cucumbers and their various traits.