

Cucumis sativus

[Synonyms : *Cucumis esculentus*, *Cucumis muricatus*, *Cucumis sativus* var. *chiar*, *Cucurbita sativus*]

CUCUMBER is a trailing annual vine. Native to northern India and the Middle East, it has yellow flowers.

It is also known as *Agurk* (Danish), *Airelu kankro* (Nepalese), *Asare kankro* (Nepalese), *Bonteng* (Sundanese), *Cetrinola* (Italian), *Cetriolo* (Italian), *Ching kwa* (Chinese), *Cocomero* (Italian), *Cohombro* (Spanish), *Cohombro à pepino* (Spanish), *Concombre* (French), *Concombre blanc* (French), *Concombre blanc long* (French), *Concombre commun* (French), *Concombre marâicher* (French), *Concombre vert long* (French), *Cowcumber*, *Cultivated cucumber*, *Dosakaya* (Telugu), *Entimun* (Malay), *Garden cucumber*, *Gommer* (German), *Gurka* (Swedish), *Gurke* (German), *Huang gua* (Chinese), *Kakdi* (Gujarati, Hindi), *Kakri* (Hindi), *Kakro* (Nepalese), *Kalabaga* (Visayan), *Katimun* (Javanese, Sundanese), *Ketimun* (Indonesian), *Kheera* (Hindi), *Kheyel* (Arabic, Persian), *Khira* (Bengali, Hindi, Nepalese), *Komkommer* (Dutch), *Kukumer* (German), *Kurkku* (Finnish), *Kyu uri* (Japanese), *Mentimun* (Javan, Malay), *Moro kyu* (Japanese), *Oh ee* (Korean), *Pepino* (Portuguese, Spanish), *Pipingkai* (Sinhalese), *Pipino* (Tagalog), *Pipinya* (Sinhalese), *Rata-kekiri* (Sinhalese), *Sukasa* (Sanskrit), *Taeng kwaa* (Thai), *Tèèng* (Laotian), *Teng ran* (Thai), *Thakhwa* (Burmese), *Tihu* (Hindi), *Timun* (Malay, Malaysian), *Trâsâk* (Khmer), *Vellarikkai* (Tamil), and *Wong kwa* (Chinese); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of extent.

Sativus means ‘cultivated’.

Archaeologists have found evidence of cucumber (which may have been semi-cultivated) at sites in Thailand that date back to about 9750 BC. A native of the Himalayan foothills, the cucumber has been cultivated in India for over 4,000 years. It was from here that the plant was introduced to ancient Egypt and progressed around the eastern end of the Mediterranean. In the Mesopotamian region archaeologists found the site of the temple to the god Nanna. This was built around 2000 BC by Ur-Nammu as an offering to protect his garden from extinction and cucumbers were one of the plants cultivated in it. Records note that cucumbers could have been found for sale on Mesopotamian ‘food stalls’.

In the Old Testament of the *Bible* it is reported that, with melons (*Cucumis melo*) and fish, the Hebrews most longed for cucumbers after they had left Egypt and were wandering in the Sinai desert in about 1200 BC. (Some authorities believe these ‘cucumbers’ were actually an uncultivated form of melon then common in Egypt and Arabia.) However once the Hebrews reached Galilee cucumbers were carefully cultivated.

It was popular with the Greeks and the Romans and Emperor Tiberius (42 BC-37 AD) was said to have had cucumbers served daily, Winter and Summer (despite a reputation they had gained by that time for indigestibility). It had certainly reached France by the time Charlemagne (747-814) was in evidence. Its acceptance by the French however did not materialize until the late 17th Century when cucumbers were grown at Versailles for Louis XIV’s (1638-1715) table. According to authorities cucumber began to be known widely in the rest of Europe from about 1573. Today the cucumber (fruit) is familiar as a salad

ingredient throughout the world, and in Malaysia at least the edible, tender leaves are also eaten, cooked like spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*).

Cucumbers were being eaten by the English nobility in the 14th Century, when Edward III (1312-1377) was on the throne, then they disappeared into obscurity for about 150 years until Henry VIII (1491-1547) held sway. Their general cultivation in England is thought to have started only in the mid-17th Century. The best crop of cucumbers was then believed to be obtained from old seed – and it was claimed that this would be further enhanced if planted by a naked young man as the virility of the seeds was thought to be matched by that of the sower.

Across the Atlantic in the North American states of Illinois, Iowa and Maryland it was said that cucumbers planted on the longest day of the year would grow into the longest in length.

Cucumber came to be familiar to some of the North American Indian tribes. It was eaten by both the Seminole Indians and some of the Chippewa tribe. The Iroquois Indians also enjoyed it as indicated in some records which declare that they ate it boiled, dried or preserved, that they used it as an ingredient in corn bread and that it was respected as a special food for ceremonial feasts.

Cosmetically, cucumber has long been known for its soothing, cooling and healing properties for the skin. Its juice is said to be able to keep the skin soft and white.

Cucumber is a commercial ingredient in cosmetic preparations. It is also used by the food industry, particularly for commercially prepared pickled cucumbers and gherkins.

Medicinally, the seeds were used in folk medicine to treat bowel disorders and catarrh.

GHERKIN is a vine.

It is also known as *Cornichon* (French).

It is believed that gherkins were popular in ancient Greek and Roman times but they only reached western Europe in about the 15th Century. First known references to them there seems to occur in 1549 in work by a French printer, Robert Stephens (1503-1559), whose family name in French was 'Étienne' and in Latin 'Stephanus'.

In India gherkins have been prepared as pickles for about 300 years.