November Newsletter

Rocky Point®

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the garden family
Grow better every day

Three top tips for growing crunchy cucumbers

Cucumbers are one of the most bountiful crops you can grow. They're crisp, delicious, and incredibly productive. When you head out to the patch expecting to pick only one, you will come back with a basketful. It's a very rewarding crop for the whole family to enjoy! Whether you're growing them in the ground or in a pot on the patio, they'll reward you and your family with weeks of fresh summer crunch.

Getting started

Cucumbers love warm to hot weather. In most parts of Australia, plant from spring through summer once the risk of frost has passed. In subtropical areas you can start mid-winter, while in the tropics it's best to sow from late summer to spring to avoid the wet season.

They're very easy to grow from seed, with sprouts starting to shoot within a week in warm weather. Sow seeds directly into the garden or start them in small punnets. If you prefer seedlings, choose smaller ones as large, root-bound plants rarely thrive.

Pick a sunny, sheltered spot with rich, free-draining soil. Add compost before planting and mound the soil if drainage is poor. A sprinkle of organic fertiliser will give your plants a strong start and your soil a boost!

Cucumber vines like to sprawl, but training them up a trellis or fence saves space, improves airflow, and keeps your fruit off damp ground. Early on, help the tendrils find the support of the trellis, after that, they'll climb happily on their own. Just keep an eye on them as you may need to give them the occasional training.

Growing and harvesting

Water seedlings carefully at first as too much water can cause them to 'damp off.' Once established, keep them evenly moist to ensure crisp, sweet fruit. Avoid wetting the leaves to help prevent powdery mildew. If it appears, remove affected leaves and treat the remaining foliage with an organic fungicide such as wettable sulphur.

When the first flowers appear, feed again with a light sprinkle of organic fertiliser. Maintain a 5-7cm layer of The Garden Family Sugar Cane Mulch around the plants to retain moisture and keep weeds down.

Harvest cucumbers when they're just the right size for their variety. If you leave them too long they can become bitter with tough skins. Don't pull them off - snip them off with scissors to protect the vines from damage. A fresh harvest will keep in the fridge for up to a week. Share your extras with family and friends or pickle them to enjoy later.

If fruiting is poor, try hand-pollinating with a soft paintbrush, transferring pollen from the male to female flowers. To identify the difference you can look for the tiny fruit at the base of blooms, this indicates that it's a female flower.

Cucumbers in pots

Cucumbers thrive in containers, too! Choose a large pot - at least 45-60cm wide - and fill it with premium potting mix. Position it where it gets at least six hours of sun each day, preferably morning sun. Train vines up a trellis, bamboo teepee, or balcony rail to save space.

Compact varieties like Spacemaster, Bush Crop, and Patio Snacker are ideal for pots, but any cucumber will do. Keep the mix evenly moist (not soggy), feed weekly with liquid fertiliser, and you'll be harvesting within about 50 days.

Let kids poke holes, drop in seeds, and make labelled popsicle-stick markers. It's hands-on and mess-friendly.

Tips to get the kids involved

Make a mini trellis by tying bamboo canes into a teepee with twine. Kids can decorate the ties with coloured ribbon so "their" vine is easy to spot.

Top picks

- **Lebanese Short:** Mild and sweet, pick at 15-20cm long.
- **Burpless:** Thin-skinned, low-acid and easy to digest.
- **Gherkin:** Small, knobbly, and perfect for pickling.
- **Crystal Apple:** Old-fashioned heirloom with round, white fruit.
- **Continental:** Long, smooth, and low in bitterness.

3 must-do garden tasks

1. Feed hungry plants

Spring feeding makes all the difference to hungry plants like roses, citrus, veggies, and container plants. Feed roses now with rose food for a continuation of beautiful blooms, and again after their summer prune, and give them weekly foliar sprays of diluted seaweed extract and fish emulsion to boost plant health. Citrus trees are tireless producers - feed with pelletised chicken manure now and again in February. If your citrus is planted “in-ground” you can protect the roots and soil by spreading a layer of **The Garden Family Tea Tree Mulch** around the root zone. Apply mulch after feeding and leave a 2-3 cm gap between the mulch and the tree stem. Vegies love ‘a little, often’, so sprinkle organic fertiliser every 3-4 weeks. And give your favourite container plants some controlled-release fertiliser according to your product directions.

2. Shade heat sensitive veggies

As summer warms up, heat sensitive crops need a little extra care. A simple cover with 30% shade cloth can protect vegies like leafy greens, tomatoes and capsicums from wilting or sunburn. Drape the cloth over a few stakes or Polypipe hoops for quick, temporary shade, and remove it once the weather cools. Young fruit trees, especially those near hot reflective surfaces like fences or walls will also benefit from some protection on scorching days. While you’re at it, cover the soil with a 5-7 cm layer of The Garden Family Sugar Cane Mulch to reduce evaporation and help keep roots cool and happy. It’s an easy weekend project the whole family can help with!

3. Repot container plants

When your potted plants start looking tired or roots are poking out the bottom, it’s time to repot! Give them a good soak first, then move them up to the next size pot. Get the kids to help you gently tease out crowded roots, place them in fresh premium potting mix, and backfill firmly. Add a little slow-release fertiliser, water thoroughly, and for outdoor pots, finish with a layer of **The Garden Family Sugar Cane Mulch** to help lock in moisture. Your plants will bounce back beautifully!

Gardener’s helpdesk

How do I control codling moth in my backyard apple and pear trees?

Codling moth is one of the most destructive pests of apples, pears, quinces and crab-apples. The adult moth lays eggs near developing fruit, and once hatched, the larvae tunnel into the core, leaving telltale frass (droppings) and holes. Several generations can appear each season, with the final one overwintering in cocoons hidden under bark or in the soil.

Control starts with good hygiene: remove loose bark and leaf litter to eliminate hiding spots. Wrap bands of corrugated cardboard around trunks to entice and trap pupating larvae, then remove and destroy them regularly. In winter, apply an oil-based spray to kill any remaining overwintering pests. During the growing season, inspect fruit weekly and destroy any that are infested. For serious infestations, exclusion is key - cover trees with fine pest netting or individual fruits with mesh bags soon after fruit set to keep moths out and fruit free of larvae.

Green beans

Savour the season

Green beans are at their best when the pods are firm, and crisp but before the seeds inside start to swell. Once your plants start producing, check them every couple of days, as pods mature quickly. Regular picking encourages more flowers and keeps beans coming. Water consistently, mulch well to retain soil moisture, and give plants some liquid fertiliser once a fortnightly. Store freshly picked beans in a perforated plastic bag in the crisper section of the fridge to keep them tender and delicious for up to a week, sometimes even two!

Choosing types

- **Bush beans (compact, quick):** great for beds and large pots; harvest in 8–9 weeks.
- **Climbing beans (prolific, longer season):** need a trellis/teepee; keep producing for weeks.

Planting & support

- **Spacing:** 15–20 cm between plants; 45–60 cm between rows (bush).
- **Depth:** Sow seeds 2–3 cm deep.
- **Support:** Install stakes/trellis at planting for climbers to avoid root disturbance.
- **Soil:** Free-draining and rich in compost.

Quick troubleshooting

- **Few pods:** Irregular watering, heat/cold during flowering, or poor pollination-keep moisture steady and add mulch.
- **Rust (orange/brown pustules):** Improve airflow, avoid overhead watering, remove affected leaves; use an approved organic fungicide if needed.
- **Aphids:** Blast with water, then apply insecticidal soap or horticultural oil.
- **Bean fly (maggot tunnels in stems):** Use fine insect netting early; remove and bin badly affected plants.
- **Slugs/snails:** Night checks, traps, or pet-safe pellets.

Salmon, green bean, potato and beetroot salad

Perfect warm or chilled, this salad makes a light but satisfying spring meal- full of colour, freshness, and a balance of creamy and zesty flavours.

Preparation: 10 minutes
Cooking: 20 minutes (allow extra 20 minutes if you don't have precooked beetroot)
Total time: 30 -50 minutes

For the salad

- 2 salmon fillets (skin on or off, as preferred)
- 400g baby potatoes, halved
- 150g green beans, trimmed
- 2 small roasted beetroots, sliced or diced
- A handful of fresh dill, chopped
- 2 cups mixed salad leaves (optional)
- Olive oil, salt, and pepper

For the creamy dressing

- ½ cup Greek yoghurt
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 clove garlic, finely minced
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh dill
- Salt and pepper to taste

Method:

- **Cook the potatoes:** Boil the baby potatoes in salted water until tender (about 10–12 minutes). Drain and let cool slightly.
- **Blanch the beans:** Add green beans to the same pot for the last 2 minutes of cooking. Drain and refresh in cold water to keep them crisp.
- **Pan-fry the salmon:** Heat olive oil in a non-stick pan over medium heat. Season salmon with salt and pepper. Cook for 3–4 minutes each side (depending on thickness) until golden and cooked through. Set aside to rest, then flake into large pieces.
- **Prepare the dressing:** Whisk together Greek yoghurt, olive oil, Dijon mustard, lemon juice, garlic, dill, salt, and pepper until smooth and creamy.
- **Assemble the salad:** In a large bowl or platter, layer potatoes, green beans, beetroot, and salad leaves. Add the flaked salmon and sprinkle with fresh dill.
- **Dress and serve:** Drizzle the yoghurt dressing over the top or serve it on the side. Finish with a crack of black pepper and a squeeze of lemon.

Mulch matters: Tips and tricks for using mulch effectively

- **Water deeply before mulching**
  Give the soil a good soak first then cover it with mulch to lock in the moisture.
- **Keep mulch away from plant stems**
  Plants stems are susceptible to rot when constantly moist so leave a 5-10 cm gap around the base.
- **Maintain the right depth**
  Aim for 5–7 cm. Too thin, and weeds can poke through; too thick, and water may struggle to reach the soil.
- **Top up regularly**
  Organic mulches break down over time. Add fresh layers as needed to maintain coverage.
- **Use the right type for the job**
  The Garden Family Sugar Cane Mulch is great for vegie patches and flower borders because it breaks down quickly and helps condition the soil. **The Garden Family Tea Tree and Rustic Bark Nuggets** are perfect for shrubberies and ornamental gardens where you need a longer lasting mulch cover.

Flower power: Bougainvillea

Bougainvilleas can bring an instant tropical or Mediterranean flair to your garden, with their vibrant bracts lighting up walls, fences, and pergolas with dazzling colour. From rich magentas and fiery oranges to soft pinks, whites, and golds, there's a shade to suit every garden palette. For smaller spaces or pots, look for dwarf varieties such as the 'Bambino' range, perfect for borders, courtyards, and containers. To keep your bougainvillea neat and blooming beautifully, trim it lightly with shears after each flush of flowers. This not only keeps it manageable but also encourages repeat flowering throughout the warmer months. Bougainvilleas thrive in sunny, well-drained spots. They're flowering now, so visit your local garden centre to find the perfect colour for your garden.

5 top flowers

- alyssum
- calibrachoa
- gerbera
- New Guinea impatiens
- salvia

5 top veggies

- beetroot
- capsicum
- eggplant
- pumpkin
- sweet corn