

Daily Union Article

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Title: Cool Off with Cucumbers!

One of the many reasons I enjoy summer is having access to fresh locally-produced fruits and vegetables. Because my family plants a large garden every year, we enjoy the bounty of efforts from June through September.

Cucumbers are one of the many vegetables we grow and we are just getting to harvest a few of these. Cucumbers are a great refreshing summer treat. Their distinctive crisp texture add extra crunch to sandwiches and salads or just as a quick snack on the go. They are typically mild in flavor which contributes to why they are an appealing vegetable for children.

In Kansas, we typically grow two types of cucumbers: pickling and salad or slicing. The pickling varieties are smaller than the salad cucumbers. Pickling cucumbers typically have a rounder body with blunt ends, as well. The slicing cucumbers are longer, usually about nine inches long with a dark green skin that has a glossy sheen. These cucumbers tend to have more tapered ends than their pickling counterparts.

Because the water content of cucumbers is high, the calorie content for these tasty vegetables are very low. A whole cup of sliced cucumbers has only 13 calories. Cucumbers are a good source of Vitamin K. Although low in protein and carbohydrates, they supply texture and variety to meals and serve as a great snack between meals.

When shopping for cucumbers, make sure you pick ones that have been kept cool or stored in the shade after harvest. Avoid cucumbers that are shriveled and withered. Also avoid those that have bulging middles. Overripe cucumbers, with large seeds and watery flesh, will have a poor, often bitter, taste. Instead, look for slender, firm, dark green cucumbers for the best flavor. Bruises and dark spots indicate decay.

Cool storage is recommended for cucumbers. Whether picking from your own garden or shopping the local farmer's market, cucumbers should be placed in the crisper of your refrigerator for storage. If the cucumbers have a wax coating, a process used in commercial vegetable production to retain freshness during transporting, store them in the crisper and use within a week. Unwaxed, store purchased cucumbers will not keep as long. Once cucumbers have been washed and sliced, wrap tightly in plastic wrap, store in the refrigerator, and use within one or two days.

Serving Ideas:

- Slice and enjoy raw. Many folks prefer to eat them peeled, but to get the best nutritional value from cucumbers, keep the peeling on! My own children prefer NOT to eat the peeling. As a compromise, I peel the washed cucumber in a way that makes

them look striped. This way my kids are getting some of the nutritional value of the peeling without turning them off from eating cucumbers.

- Slice and toss with your favorite low-fat vinaigrette.
- Add to salads for both crunch and color.
- Use cucumbers to add crispness to sandwiches. (See recipe at the end of this article.)
- Cook sliced cucumbers with your favorite herbs.

Kids can enjoy the fresh taste of cucumbers any time. Just wash them in running water and hand them over! Here are a couple of tasty recipes for cucumbers for your family to enjoy:

Marinated Vegetable Salad

Ingredients:

- 3 tablespoons rice wine vinegar
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 medium cucumbers, peeled (optional), diced and seeded
- 1 red bell pepper
- 2 carrots, thinly sliced

Directions:

1. Heat rice wine vinegar and sugar in a saucepan until sugar dissolves. Set aside.
2. Combine cucumbers, peppers, and carrots in a large bowl.
3. Pour vinegar mixture over the vegetables and toss. Add salt and pepper to taste.
4. Refrigerate for 2-3 hours. Serve cold.

Cucumber and Cheese Sandwich (1 serving)

Ingredients:

- 2 slices whole wheat bread
- 2 teaspoons low-fat mayonnaise
- ½ cup cucumbers, peeled and sliced thin
- 1 oz. sliced cheddar cheese.

Directions:

1. On one slice of bread, spread mayonnaise evenly.
2. Lay cucumbers and cheese slices evenly on bread.
3. Lay second piece of bread on top to make a sandwich.
4. Serve immediately

Using fresh vegetables in your meal preparations is a great way to enjoy the bounty of summer gardens while adding variety to your menu. For more meal ideas using fresh vegetables, you can contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!