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In the descriptions of Johnny's Selected Seed's cucumbers you will find words such as gynoecious, bitter-free, Beit Alpha, and possibly other terms that may not be familiar to you. In choosing the cucumber varieties right for you, keep in mind that preferences vary by market. It may take you a few years of growing different types to find those that both grow well and sell well in your area.

Of primary importance in all cucumbers is whether or not they require pollination to produce fruit. Varieties that don't need pollination are referred to as parthenocarpic. If you are growing in a hoop house or greenhouse, where there are few bees or other pollinators, parthenocarpic varieties are strongly recommended. Look for the greenhouse symbol next to the variety name in the catalog.

Many newer cucumber varieties are gynoecious, which means they have mostly or only female flowers (the ones that make the fruits). In a regular cucumber plant, the first 10-20 flowers are male, and for every female flower, 10-20 male flowers are produced. Plants with all female flowers are earlier and have higher yields. With some gynoecious varieties, the female flowers need to be pollinated by male flowers; in such cases, up to 10% of the seeds will be a pollinator variety that produces male flowers.

Other varieties are both gynoecious and parthenocarpic, meaning you get the high yields of all-female flowers without the need for pollinator plants.

## CUCUMBER TYPES

- **American slicing:** These cucumbers are the biggest and thickest-skinned, which makes them the best choice for shipping. Harvested at 7-8" long, they have a medium amount of spines and bumps distributed over the dark green skin of the fruit. This traditional American type remains the most popular cucumber in some markets.
- **Pickling:** These are smaller than slicing cucumbers, an essential feature for canning. Pickling cukes also are delicious eaten fresh because they are crisp and juicy. European and American pickling cucumbers are differentiated by appearance, with the Americans having fewer, larger spines and bumps and the Europeans having many small spines. The European picklers are the best choice for making gherkin pickles because they are nicely proportioned at a very small size.
- **Cocktail:** Usually picked at 3-4" long, cocktail cucumbers are known as some of the best for flavor and crunchy texture. Their small size and thin skins have earned them the nickname "snack cucumber" because they are so easy to eat out of hand. They are cylindrical in shape and spineless. These are usually sold in bags or clamshells since the skins dehydrate so easily. Cocktail cucumber varieties are usually grown in the greenhouse.

Then there are the varieties categorized as Spineless and Thin-skinned. This covers a lot of territory, literally. Cucumbers are popular the world over and many types bear the names of the regions or countries where they originated.

- **Dutch:** 14"-long, thin, spineless cucumbers usually grown in a greenhouse. Their thin skins contribute to their excellent eating quality, but cause them to dehydrate quickly. They are often found in supermarkets shrink-wrapped in plastic.
- **Beit Alpha:** Smaller than the Dutch varieties, Beit Alpha cucumbers average about 5-8" long. Their flavor and crisp texture make them a desirable choice for gourmet markets. Like the Dutch cucumbers, they are thin-skinned and need to be protected from cucumber beetles and dehydration.
- **Asian:** These are spiny, slender, and long — as much as a foot long. They require trellising to keep the fruits long and straight.

When Asian cucumbers were first introduced in the United States, they were marketed as being burpless, meaning they don't cause gas. Since then, many other so-called burpless varieties have been introduced. Because "burpless" is a subjective term, Johnny's has steered away from using it in variety descriptions. Look for varieties described as bitter-free or non-bitter. However, some research has been done into what causes some cucumbers to offend the stomach. It is now thought that "burpiness" is caused by cucurbitacins, the bitter compounds found in all cucurbits. Seedless, thin-skinned varieties have lower cucurbitacin amounts and therefore are more likely to be burpless.

Finally, consider disease pressure when choosing cucumber varieties. Varieties vary in their disease resistance, so check the catalog descriptions carefully if you have had problems in the past.