

# Growing Early Cucumbers

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THE cucumber (*Cucumis sativus*), a native of Africa and Asia, is undoubtedly the most popular member of the *Cucurbitaceae* family. The hardier outdoor varieties grow readily in most parts of New Zealand in summer and early autumn, but commercial production of early crops is undertaken mainly in the warmer districts of Auckland Province. The earliest cucumbers are grown in heated glasshouses, but unheated glasshouses, frames, and hotcaps are also used for early crops.

USUALLY production is combined with the growing of other crops, such as pumpkins, rock melons, tomatoes, and strawberries. Production ranges from 15lb. to 20lb. a plant for glasshouse and cold frame culture and up to 30lb. a plant in the open.

## Seed

Many growers prefer to save their own seed and choose vigorous plants carrying heavy, disease-free crops of good shape. Poor-shaped fruits should

▼ Popular cucumber varieties. A—Long Prickly. B—White Spine. C—Apple. D—Telegraph. E—Money Maker. F—Crystal Apple.

be removed from the plant and the selected fruits left to mature thoroughly. In glasshouses it will be necessary to hand pollinate the female flower.

## Seed Extraction

Seed extraction is best done by the acid method, 2 fl. oz. of commercial hydrochloric acid being used to each 5lb. of fruit. The pulp should be scooped into wooden or porcelain containers and the acid stirred into the pulp with a wooden stick. Occasional stirrings should be given during the next 3 hours, after which the seed may be washed in a fine sieve under running water before being set out in the sun to dry.



## Propagation

Plants are raised under glass for setting out in their permanent positions. Seeds are sown in pots of sterilised compost in June for planting in the cucumber-type house and in August for cold frames and outdoors. It is usual to sow 3 seeds in each earthenware pot and allow the strongest plant to remain. The pots are set in large wooden trays 6in. in depth and half filled with sterilised potting mixture. All watering is done to the soil in the trays so that the collars of the plants are kept dry and the risk of

