In choosing the cucumber varieties right for you, it is important to understand the terminology surrounding types, pollination needs, and other factors. Preference for one type over another varies by individual and by market.

**POLLINATION NEEDS AND FLOWER NUMBERS**

**Parthenocarpic** varieties do not require pollination to produce fruit. These are highly recommended if you are growing in a hoophouse or greenhouse, where there are few bees or other pollinators. Parthenocarpic varieties can easily be identified by the greenhouse symbol in our catalog and on our website.

**Gynoecious** varieties have mostly or only female flowers — the flowers that produce fruit — and typically are earlier and have higher yields. In a nongynoecious cucumber plant, the first 10–20 flowers are male and for every female flower 10–20 male flowers are produced. With some gynoecious varieties, the female flowers need to be pollinated by male flowers; in such cases, we include up to 10% of pollenizer seeds that produce male flowers.

Other varieties are both gynoecious and parthenocarpic, meaning they have the high yields of all-female flowers without the need for pollenizer plants. Varieties that are parthenocarpic and gynoecious should be protected from pollinating insects if seedless fruits are desired. Pollination results in seeded fruits and may be considered unmarketable. Generally, these types are grown separately in greenhouses or hoophouses with insect screens installed.

**CUCUMBER TYPES**

- **American slicing:**
  These cucumbers are the biggest and thickest-skinned, making them the best choice for shipping and field production. Harvested at 7–9 inches long, they have a medium amount of spines and bumps distributed over dark green skin. This traditional American type remains the most popular cucumber in some markets. While the skin is edible, it often imparts a slight bitterness. For the best eating quality, the skin of American slicers is generally peeled before eating.

- **Pickling:**
  These are smaller than slicing cucumbers, 3–5 inches long. Pickling cucumbers are essential for canning, but are also delicious eaten fresh because they are crisp and juicy. Their flesh should remain crisp and their skin should maintain its structure even after being pickled.
  - **American pickling** cucumbers have fewer, larger spines and bumps.
  - **European pickling** cucumbers have 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 (aka: snack cucumber):**
  Usually picked at 3–4 inches long, cocktail cucumbers are known as some of the best for flavor and crunchy texture. Their small size, thin skins, and lack of spines make them favorable to eat as snacks. These are usually sold in bags or clamshells since the skins dehydrate so easily. Cocktail cucumber varieties are usually grown in the greenhouse in order to protect their thin skins.
Then there are varieties categorized as Spineless and Thin-skinned.

- **Long European Type (or Dutch):** 14”-long, thin, spineless cucumbers usually grown in a greenhouse. Thin skin contributes to their excellent eating quality, but causes quick dehydration. They are often found in supermarkets shrink-wrapped in plastic. A well-bred European type should have few seeds, and the seeds they do have will be very small in size.

- **Beit Alpha:** Smaller than the European varieties, Beit Alpha cucumbers average about 5–8” long. Their flavor, crisp texture, and diminished seeds make them a desirable choice for gourmet markets. Like the European cucumbers, they are thin-skinned and need to be protected from cucumber beetles and dehydration. For field production, select Beit Alpha varieties specifically bred to endure outdoor conditions; the skin will be slightly thicker than the standard greenhouse varieties.

- **Asian:** These are spiny, slender, and long — as much as a foot long. They require trellising to keep the fruits long and straight. Their skin is generally thinner and less bitter than that of an American slicer, but it is thick enough to discourage cucumber beetles and slow dehydration.

**FLAVOR**

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.