

## Cucumber Sandwiches

Cucumber sandwiches can be traced back to 1870, when British settlers in India were trying to find a way to cope with the heat, and apparently cucumbers helped. Soon after, cucumber sandwiches became a staple of afternoon tea.

However, cucumber sandwiches were considered “high class” food for the wealthy, because only the rich could afford greenhouses to grow cucumbers. And only the rich could afford to eat something that offered so little in the way of nutrition. Cucumbers are a good source of vitamins K, A, C, and potassium, but they are 95% water and contain no protein.

The luxury of eating something so nutritionally insubstantial was reinforced by the visual presentation of the cucumber sandwiches served at Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee in 1887. They became associated with the Raj of India in the late 1800s and were even referenced in Oscar Wilde’s play *The Importance of Being Earnest*, as a “reckless extravagance.”

By the time Edward took the throne, hothouse cucumbers became more affordable, and cucumber sandwiches were enjoyed by people outside the upper class, however they still remained a bit of a decadent treat.

To make a proper cucumber sandwich:

As the thinness of the bread is a point of pride in the kitchen, a dense-textured white Pullman loaf is cut with a wide-bladed knife, which guides the cut; daylight should pass through the resulting fine pores. The peel of the cucumber is either removed or scored lengthwise with a fork before the cucumber is sliced. The slices of bread are carefully buttered all the way to the edges in the thinnest coating, which is only to prevent the bread from becoming damp with cucumber juice, and the slices of cucumber, which have been dashed with salt and lemon juice, are placed in the sandwich just before serving in order to prevent the sandwich from becoming damp enough to moisten the eater's fingers. The crusts of the bread are cut away cleanly, and the sandwiches are cut into triangles, creating tea sandwiches. Side note: The British use only butter on their cucumber sandwiches. The Americans use cream cheese; benedictine, a green, soft spread that can be made from cucumbers and cream cheese; or cream cheese and an assortment of herbs.