

Let's Demonize and Celebrate the Boring, Bland, Insipid, and Weird-Tasting Cucumber

Shôn Ellerton, February 27, 2026

In my opinion, there are only four ways in which the bland, weird-tasting and insipid cucumber can truthfully be enjoyed.



I walked into my local grocery shop and was excited to see beautiful green fresh zucchini going for a dollar a kilo except I should have gone to Specsavers because lo and behold, they were those damned cucumbers.

Foiled once again!

Never quite understood the appeal of cucumbers. I guess if I was desperate for water and there wasn't any around except for a nearby stash of cucumbers, I'd eat them purely for the sake of self-preservation.

I don't particularly like salads *unless* they're really good and original but, in general, I am *deeply* suspicious of them. This is where the host decides to throw in a bit of this and a bit of that much like those so-called fusion and medley dishes so many rave about.

And then there's the ubiquitous cucumber. It's seemingly almost always there in a salad. It is a bland-tasting watery thing which has a genuinely weird aftertaste. I'm not really into bland-tasting food anyway, especially food made for rabbits like kale and iceberg lettuce. But cucumbers are particularly bland when eaten alone. And in salads, that's how they're eaten.

Apart from eating them, they seem to, allegedly, have some use for skin care. You see those pictures of women with slices of cucumbers covering their eyes.

But it's one of those veggie items which always seem to be overly abundant. It seems that all the stuff I *don't* like all that much grows abundantly. And that includes that horrid kale. My wife had planted some in our veggie patch and it grows like a veritable weed.

In fact, I think it's a conspiracy against me. Spinach, cauliflower, zucchini and green beans. Stuff that I like.

All expensive!

And I can prove it.

Many people *hate* Brussels sprouts with a passion. I love them and they are damned pricey. And as for tomatoes, I don't like them, unless they're in a sauce. And yet, our local market gets rid of boxes of them for only a few bucks each.

I'm being hyperbolic of course.

But let's return to cucumbers.

I will give credit to cucumbers in four highly original ways.

The **first** way is the *only* way to eat them if they're in actual pieces or chunks. And that is the way they do it in western China, particularly with Uyghur cuisine. My Chinese mother-in-law can make it this way and it's incredibly tasty. So surprising how something that doesn't taste good for my palate can transform to something so delicious.

Basically this is a partly-smashed cucumber dish with lots of garlic, ginger, chili oil, soy sauce, vinegar, sugar and sesame seeds. The resulting dish is a surprising combo of savoury, sweet, and sour all in one. Even better using Japanese cucumbers which have a sweeter flavour than your standard English variety.

This dish is obviously served cold but it holds itself as almost a complete and very healthy dish. This is how a salad should be! However, it goes particularly well with a strong-flavoured meaty dish like a Middle Eastern braised lamb or Chinese-style duck.



The **second** way to eat cucumbers is not to eat them but infuse them into cocktails, particularly gin-based ones like Hendricks, for example.

Need I say more?

No. Let's move on.



The **third** way to eat them is as a cucumber soup.

Now, to be fair, there's more to cucumber soup than just cucumbers. There's the savoury broth, which is usually vegetable or chicken-based. There's the creaminess which tends to come from something like avocados and yogurt. And a bunch of other things like garlic, lemon and garnishes like parsley and black pepper.

And the bonus is that you can have piping hot cucumber soup, because cold soup is quite revolting.

Hey! I'm writing this, so I can say what I like!



And the **fourth** and last way to eat cucumbers is, perhaps, the most peculiar *and* one of the most common ways to eat them, if you're in Britain.

Cucumber sandwiches!

Now, I have a little story about cucumber sandwiches.

For some of my young childhood, I had lived in the UK, and my father took these mysterious visits into London taking me with him in his Jaguar XJS. He would don up in a suit and we'd leave silly early in the morning to avoid that nasty London traffic. Traffic was just as bad in the 70s because the roads didn't cater well for heavy traffic. The M25 hadn't quite opened yet which would seem unimaginable these days without it. Despite huge improvements with the roads, the roads still can't cope because there's *more* traffic.

We'd arrive at some posh townhouse in the middle of Chelsea, Knightsbridge, Holland Park or Kensington. I never knew quite what he was up to but it seemed that he always got caught up with quite influential people to conduct some possibly nefarious business dealings or whatnot. I could never get a simple-to-understand answer from him. After all, I think I was only around five or so, but I remember some parts extremely clearly.

I remember the often magnificent darkish foyers of the townhouses with its deep-grained wooden interior, the assortment of fancy clocks, and horns of animals projecting from the panelled walls.

But the odd thing I remember so clearly was my dad's favourite choice as to where to eat in the middle of London. Unlike me, his choice of food was not that adventurous when it came to international cuisine, so we skipped all the delicious Middle Eastern and Indian fare which I liked, being introduced to it by my

grandfather. He liked Chinese food, but he was really only confined to eating Peking duck, crab and sweetcorn soup and sweet and sour pork. And as for pub food, I think he found it too 'beneath him' to go to a pub. Especially when wearing his suit.

As an understatement, he was not a particularly agreeable person at the best of times.

So where did we go?

The Ritz Hotel, that's where.

He took me there a few times on such occasions. And yes, the Ritz is magnificent. I could never forget that over-the-top French renaissance-style look with its gold edged features, the pink and orange pastel wall colours, the marble columns, and all the mirrors. It was utterly beautiful and the Ritz knew it and, therefore, didn't want riff-raff to be there which is why they pretentiously enforced a suit-only rule. He had a suit so he was fine to dine there but being a kid, I got away with it.

Menu prices are, of course, astronomical. But we did not partake of anything on the menu except one item.

Cucumber sandwiches and tea.

Yours for five pounds, which, in today's money is something like sixty quid. He didn't have to pay extra for me.

Now *that* is a lot of money for cucumber sandwiches and tea. However, what you *did* get was an *unlimited* amount of cucumber sandwiches and tea. Not only that, we got other niceties like little cakes and biscuits, but in essence, it was cucumber sandwiches. And you had an amazing atmosphere in which to eat them along with impeccable service.

I don't know about now, but the Ritz had delicious cucumber sandwiches. You had two kinds of bread, white and brown. My father, only liking white bread, left me with the brown, which I preferred having more taste. Both breads were exceptionally good being fresh straight from the bakers. They removed the crusts which seems to be fashionable with posh cucumber sandwiches. As for the butter, I wasn't much of a butter connoisseur back then, but I do remember the butter being very nice, unlike that awful yellow Anchor butter which we used to have in the house.

As for the cucumber, they were *thinly* sliced, so rather than having that thick chunky texture of a raw cucumber, the sliced cucumber embedded itself flawlessly into the luscious butter on the bread.

It was a good combo. Personally, I also like to add a quick pinch of salt as well.

The tea, an integral part of this culinary ritual, was absolutely perfect. I was obviously brought up on English tea at a very early age! The colour was that perfect golden colour with that spot-on blend of Kenyan, Assam and Ceylon tea all decanted from vintage silver pots into fine bone China cups.

We'd sit there for the best part of two hours gorging ourselves.



Yes. Boring cucumber sandwiches! But now I know why this became one of those peculiarly popular British traditions. They taste great *and* it's cheap fodder which everyone can afford at home.

So, what do I think of the cucumber?

When eaten plain, a rather unpleasant, insipid and bland experience with an aftertaste probably not too far removed from drinking the water out of a toilet bowl. However, when given special treatment is applied as how I outlined above, the cucumber can be miraculously transformed into something quite delightful.