



CUCUMBER

CUCUMBER, *Cucumis sativus* L. (of the family Cucurbitaceae), in Persia generally called *kīār* (with occasional slight variants), a term that is also employed to designate the fruit of certain other plants (see below).

Words for cucumber in Middle and New Persian. In the *Bundahišn* the *wādrang* “cucumber” is listed as one of the ten species of fruit “edible both outside and inside” (16.26; TD₂, fol. 61b; tr. Anklesaria, p. 151; translation as “citron,” another meaning of Pahlavi *wādrang* [see *bālang*], is clearly ruled out by the context here, as the citron is a bitter fruit of which only the candied peel is eaten; this confusion is also reflected in Ṭabarī, I, p. 127; tr. I, p. 298; Baḷ’amī, ed. Bahār, p. 92; Asmussen, p. 17). The *xār-wādrang* (perhaps a misspelling of **xīār-wādrang*; cf. *kīār-bādrang/bādrang* in Birūnī, 1973, p. 301; idem, 1318 Š./1939, p. 374; Maydānī, p. 501; Zamaḳṣarī, I, p. 82) mentioned in the Pahlavi text *Xusraw ī Kawādān* (par. 45) as one of the fruits best suited for making preserves (*ambag*) was probably the cucumber (ed. Monchizadeh, p. 73 n. 77); in this meaning *kīār(-e) bādrang/bālang* is still current in Pashto and in the dialects of Shiraz, Yazd, Kermān, and Afghanistan (Bellew, pp. 9, 219; Afḡānīnevīs, p. 34; Dehḡodā, s.v. *kīār*; Wā‘ez Taḡawī, p. 29).

Kīār in the specific sense of “cucumber” is known in Middle Persian only as the Pāzand gloss of the ideogram BWṢYN’ (*Frahang i Pahlavīk*, pp. 51, 102). Ṣādeq Kīā (p. 120), however, has argued that this ideogram, which he has deciphered as *bo/ūjīnā*, is an Iranian vocable related to Persian *boza* (“a kind of fragrant fruit”; *Borhān-e qāte’*, ed. Mo‘īn, I, p. 275) and referred to types of melons and cucumbers (cf. the reading *bōč/jīnā*, *Frahang i Pahlavīk*, p. 102;



Justi, p. 90; *būjepā* in *Borhān-e qāteʿ*, ed. Moʿīn, I, p. 313). Although some classical Arabic writers used *kīār* along with, or in place of, the Arabic words *qettāʿ* and *qaṭad*, it was generally recognized as a loanword from Persian (Adīb Naṭanzī, p. 144; Maydānī, p. 501; Ebn ʿAwwām, II, pp. 223-25; Ghaleb, I, no. 7930; Lane, s.v. *kīār*; but cf. Meyerhof, in Ebn Maymūn, p. 194 no. 388, where it is presented as a pure Arabic word). Iranian cognates for *kīār* include Khotanese *byāra*, Buddhist Sanskrit of Kuci (the Kucha oasis in the Tarim basin) *guyara*, and Choresmian *vyārūč* (Bailey, *Dictionary*, p. 308; for Indo-Aryan cognates, see Turner, s.v. *kṣīraka*).

In Persian poetry *kīār* is first attested in a distich by Labībī (fl. 10th-11th centuries; quoted in *Loḡat-e fors*, ed. Eqbāl, p. 414, s.v. *ḡāvšū*). [Boshāq Aṭʿema](#) (d. ca. 830/1426) mentioned in the same poem (p. 43) *bālang* and *toranj* (two varieties of citron) and *kīār-e sabz* “green cucumber” as three of the finest fruits.

A few other Persian (or dialectal) names for cucumber are recorded, including *kīārza* (= *kīār-čanbar*; see below), said to be synonymous with Arabic *šaʿārīr* or *qettāʿ* (Tonokābonī, pp. 371, 660; *Borhān-e qāteʿ*, ed. Moʿīn, II, p. 800; ʿAqīlī Ḳorāsānī, p. 673), and the obsolete *ḡāvšū*, *ḡāvoš*, *ḡāš*, and *kāvoš*, referring to a variety of cucumber grown for its seeds (*Loḡat-e fors*, ed. Eqbāl, pp. 414, 215; *Borhān-e qāteʿ*, ed. Moʿīn, s.vv.; Tattavī, I, p. 564, II, pp. 995, 996; Nakjavānī, p. 154; cf. Laufer, *Sino-Iranica*, p. 301).

Medical uses. Cucumbers and the seeds of the fully ripened fruit were believed to have medicinal properties: “*Qettāʿ* and *qaṭad* are called *kīār* [in Persian] Both . . . particularly their seeds, are cold and moist in the second degree; they assuage the [bodily] heat, quench thirst, are diuretic and lenitive, cleanse the kidneys and the bladder, and relieve a burning sensation during urination” (Mowaffaq Heravī, p. 250; cf. ʿAlī b. Sahl Rabban Ṭabarī, p. 380; Aqīlī Ḳorāsānī, pp. 673, 676-77).

Culinary uses. Cucumbers are usually eaten raw (with salt) or pickled. Mīrzā ʿAlī-Akbar, the chef of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah Qājār (1264-1313/1848-96; see [cookbooks](#)), gave recipes for cucumber pickles (pp. 62-63) and stuffed cucumbers (*dolma-ye kīār*, p. 42; for a modern recipe, see *Dastūr-e ṭabbākī*, p. 78). Today culinary uses of the *kīār* include the rather uncommon *morabbā-ye kīār* (cucumber preserves); *māst-o-kīār*, a very popular appetizer of chopped or grated cucumbers mixed with yogurt, seasoned with salt and pepper, and sometimes including raisins, chopped walnuts, onions, and mint; *āb-dūḡ-kīār*,



iced thinned yogurt with chopped cucumbers, which is very popular in hot weather, especially among the poor, who may soak bread in it for the midday meal; *sekanjabīn-kīār* or *kīār-sekanjabīn*, a drink made from grated or chopped cucumbers and *sekanjabīn*, which is a concoction of sugar and vinegar usually flavored with mint extract; *pālūda-ye kīār*, peeled and grated cucumbers in an iced sherbet of rosewater or *bīdmešk* distillate (see *bīd*); *toršī-e kīār* or *kīār-toršī*, small cucumbers pickled in vinegar; *kīār-šūr*, cucumbers pickled in brine; *toršī-e maḳlūṭ* and *maḳlūṭ-e šūr* (pickled mixed vegetables, including cucumbers; for recipes, see Montazemī, pp. 470, 641; Ḥekmat, pp. 134-35; *Dastūr-e ṭabbāḳī*, pp. 150, 153, 159). The cucumber is also a main ingredient in a popular salad known as *šīrāzī*. Dishes known as *būrānī-e kīār* and *qayma-ye kīār* were known in the Safavid period (Bāvaṛčī, pp. 154-55; Nūr-Allāh, pp. 238-39).

Cultivation and varieties. In some areas of Persia two or three crops of cucumbers are harvested each year. This fact and the varied climate of the country account for the availability of fresh cucumbers almost everywhere in Persia at all seasons. There are many varieties, differing in size, form, quality of peel, and flavor, but most are picked and eaten green; fully ripened, yellow cucumbers are harvested only for their seeds. Although several marketable varieties of cucumber are native to Persia, they are generally not resistant to such diseases as mosaic. Efforts have reportedly been made to render them less vulnerable through selection, hybridization with disease-resistant foreign varieties, and better pest control (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, I, pp. 907, 909-12). Moḥammad Ṭabāṭabā'ī (I, pp. 912-21) has described varieties from fifteen principal cucumber-growing areas between Bāsmejn in Azarbaijan and the hot southern regions around Ahvāz and Jīroft. A kind of long (up to 1 m), thick, almost cylindrical cucumber grows in Gilān (locally called *baram[ī] keyār* or simply *baram*); the mature fruits provide cucumber seeds (Faḳrā'ī, p. 121; Pāyanda Langarūdī, p. 346).

Another kind of “cucumber,” actually a melon, known in Persia is the *kīār-čānbar* (lit., “loop/clavicle[-like] cucumber,” Eng. “snake cucumber/melon/gourd,” *Cucumis melo* L. var. *flexuosus*), named for its long, sinuous fruit (see Renaud and Colin, pp. 151-52; Meyerhof, in Ebn Maymūn, pp. 171-72 no. 343; Ṭabāṭabā'ī, I, p. 925). Some modern local names for the snake cucumber are *čānbar-kīār* in Khorasan, *kīār-šeng(ū)* in Kermān and Yazd, and *kīārza* in Shiraz (cf. *kīārza*, above). It is probably also the *kalvanda* mentioned by Boshāq Aṭ'ema (pp. 11, 43, 198; cf. Tattavī, II, pp. 956, 1183;



Borhān-e qāṭe', ed. Mo'īn, III, p. 1684; cf. Clément-Mullet, pp. 90-122; Renaud and Colin, pp. 151-52). It is cultivated mostly for its medicinal seeds.

The *kīār-e waḥṣī* (obsolete *kīār-e daštī*, lit., “wild cucumber,” Eng. squirting cucumber) or *kīār-e kar/kar-kīār* “donkey cucumber,” *Ecbal(l)ium elaterium/officinarum* A. Rich., grows wild in many places in Persia, including Arasbārān, Ḥasanbeyglū, and Dašt-e Moḡān in Azarbaijan, where it is called *ešek kīārī* (donkey cucumber); Ṭāleš, Rūdbār, and Harzevīl in Gīlān; and around Isfahan, where it is called *komūz-e sagī/kaval* (Schlimmer, p. 171; Andersen, p. 2). It was formerly very important in medicine (ʿAqīlī Ḳorāsānī, pp. 673-76; Schlimmer, p. 171), especially as a drastic purgative and a poultice against “cold tumors,” but it has fallen into disuse, probably because the fruit is pungent and irritating to mucous membranes.

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