

Germany: land of 18-inch cucumbers

BY CURT HARLER
BERLIN, WEST GERMANY — Cucumbers explain a number of the differences an American visitor notices upon arrival in Germany.

The milk's not the same as at home, and the whole agricultural system is a bit unique.

But the people are uniformly wonderful and quite patient with an American whose German accent is more Spanish sounding than German.

The cucumbers in Germany, and throughout northern Europe, tend to be giants by U.S. standards. They run 16 to 18 inches long, some pushing two feet.

Those cucumbers are uniformly skinny, certainly no more than two or three inches in diameter.

Compare that to the typical American pickle and you'll soon see why a visitor may suspect the vegetable merchants are selling green spaghetti.

The cucumbers are practical since every slice is nearly uniform in size. And the smaller size is convenient for salads.

The cucumbers we grow are every bit as tasty as theirs. In a salad it would be impossible to tell the difference.

Cucumbers are like many things in German life: smaller, more compact, and quite practical.

Milk for the supermarket is packaged in one liter cartons—about the volume in a U.S. quart. But again the packaging is quite different.

The German milk bottle looks more like a cake mix box than the traditional pointed-top milk carton the American shopper is used to looking for.

Getting the milk carton open is a challenge. It

requires a pair of scissors and a steady hand to assure none of the liquid is sloshed out.

Inside, too, there are some differences.

It's not the taste which is unique . . . after all, many of our best cows are of German ancestry.

Our German friends assured us they could leave their milk cartons on the table for as long as three days at room temperature without danger of the milk spoiling.

In the U.S., the University of Maryland has had some preliminary publicity on a process which is supposed to

keep milk from spoiling at room temperature.

But the Germans seem to have it today. We had several different conversations on the subject and the Germans assured that the process was not the typical homogenized nor pasteurized product U.S. stores sell.

The process allows milk to stay on the table without turning bad. It's a big help for forgetful homemakers; saves space in the tiny European sized refrigerators; and, since milk on the table is easy to grab, makes milk more available to children looking for a quick drink.

Germans are only just discovering sweet corn as a vegetable.

Until recently, corn was for cattle and hogs and no self-respecting German homemaker would put such a dish before the family.

Today, Germans say, it is more common for corn to be served as a vegetable along with a whole host of other vegetables Americans would consider common.

Germans are a great nation of gardeners. Even in the large cities like Berlin, vast tracts are given over to

personal gardens. Called Schreiber gardens, after the man who proposed them, they are a status symbol for the upper-middle class Berliner.

Schreiber, writing in the early 1900s, said it is important for city dwellers to have close contact with the soil. To that end, he proposed a system whereby any urbanite could have a garden of his own.

The Schreiber gardens are tiny plots, no more than 25 yards square on the average, each with a small one or two

room house. The Germans come out to their summer home on weekends, grow dwarf fruit trees, garden vegetables, and flowers.


It keeps the city in touch with agriculture and provides a healthy recreation.

One of the growing conflicts in Berlin is over the loss of the garden areas to development. The Berliners like their plots, and even though they inevitably will lose them, they cherish the

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