

Astronaut Plans to Grow Space Cucumbers

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BAIKONUR, Kazakhstan — Cucumbers may be out of favor on Earth, but a Japanese astronaut said Monday that he plans to harvest the vegetable on board the International Space Station.

Satoshi Furukawa is set to blast off early Wednesday for a half-year stint in orbit along with cosmonaut Sergei Volkov and NASA astronaut Michael Fossum.

Speaking about experiments scheduled for the next few months, Furukawa said he would be growing cucumbers as part of ongoing studies on how future space explorers will be able to harvest their own food.

"We wish we were able to eat the cucumbers, but we have not been allowed," Furukawa, a doctor, said at a news conference.

Millions of concerned consumers across Europe have been spurning cucumbers in the wake of an E. coli outbreak blamed on contaminated vegetables.

Volkov said the Russian segment would be planting tomatoes and joked that he hoped astronauts might be granted permission to prepare a salad. "To be honest," he added, "what I would really like is fried potatoes."

Japan has led the way in trying to raise culinary standards in space. Japanese astronaut Soichi Noguchi, who is at the Baikonur Cosmodrome escorting Furukawa's family, even made his own sushi while on the space station last year.

Fossum, Furukawa and Volkov are due to return to Earth in mid-November.

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