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Making Fresh Pack
Pickle Products

Increased consumer interest in home food preservation has resulted in many questions about the preparation of pickle products. Some pickle products, such as fresh pack dills, bread and butter pickles, pickled fruit and relishes, may be easily and quickly prepared at home by inexperienced pickle makers. Other types of pickles, such as brined or fermented dills, gherkins, and sauerkraut, require greater skills and take more time. For this information, see Food Science and Nutrition Fact Sheet 27, Making Fermented Pickles and Sauerkraut.

KINDS OF PICKLES

Pickle products are classified on the basis of ingredients used and the method of preparation. There are four general classes:

- Fermented pickles or brined pickles go through a curing process for several weeks when various fermentative bacteria produce a characteristic lactic acid flavor. Sauerkraut is brined or fermented cabbage.
- Fresh pack or quick process pickles like whole cucumber dills, crosscut cucumber slices, bread and butter pickles, are brined or soaked in a salt solution for several hours or overnight, then drained and combined with boiling hot vinegar, spices, and other seasonings. The tart flavor of these easily prepared products is due to the acetic acid in vinegar.
- Fruit pickles are usually prepared from whole fruits and simmered in a spicy, sweet sour syrup. Peaches, pears, and watermelon rind are prepared this way.
- Relishes are prepared from fruits and vegetables which are chopped, seasoned, and then cooked to desired consistency.

INGREDIENTS

Vegetables

Cucumbers—Plant a variety of cucumbers intended for pickling. Do not expect good quality pickles if you use immature table-type or "slicing" cucumbers. If you purchase cucumbers for pickling, make sure they are a suitable variety and freshly harvested. If you buy a bushel of pickling cucumbers, be ready to start pickling immediately.

Other vegetables and fruits used in pickle products should be good quality and fresh.

Dill—Use clean, fresh, insect-free heads of dill. Avoid over-mature, dry, brown dill.

Vinegar

All USDA tested and recommended pickle recipes are based on the use of 4-6 percent acetic acid vinegar. This is the range of acidity of most high quality commercially bottled vinegar. Check the label to be sure the vinegar contains 4-6 percent acetic acid; 40-60 grain acetic acid means the same thing. Cider vinegar or white distilled vinegar may be used in pickle recipes. Cider vinegar has a more mellow taste, but may discolor certain vegetables. White distilled vinegar has a sharper taste; it is not imitation or synthetic vinegar. Use white vinegar where a light color is important.

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Some old time recipes are based on 3 percent acidity vinegars. This is the reason some of grandma's pickle recipes do not give the expected results when prepared today.

DO NOT use homemade vinegar of unknown acidity. Some stores will sell vinegar from the barrel. Make certain of the acidity of this barrel vinegar before you buy it for pickling; your pickles may spoil if the vinegar you use is below 4 percent acetic acid content.

Salt

Use special canning salt which does not contain any iodine and anti-caking agents which may cause darkening and cloudiness in pickles.

Water

Use soft water if possible. Extremely hard water can cause discoloration of pickles particularly if it has a high iron content. Some types of hard water may be somewhat softened by the following method. Boil water for 5 minutes, skim off the scum, let the water rest 24 hours. When the sediment has settled to the bottom, pour off the water from the top and use.

Sugar

White or brown sugar may be used in the following recipes. Brown sugar may darken the liquid slightly. If you plan to use a non-nutritive saccharin type sweetener, use recipes that accompany these products.

Spices

Use fresh spices for best flavor in pickle products. Store leftover spices in a cool place.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

For Measuring

Measuring cups and spoons—You will need household scales if a recipe specifies ingredients by weight.

For Heating Pickling Liquids

Use unchipped enamelware, stainless steel, aluminum, or glass pots for heating pickling liquids. DO NOT use copper, iron, or galvanized utensils. These metals may react with acids or salts and cause undesirable color and flavors, or even form toxic compounds in the pickle mixture.

For Packing the Pickles

Use standard canning jars free of chips, cracks, or nicks which could prevent an airtight seal. Widemouth jars are easiest for dill pickles. DO NOT use empty mayonnaise, peanut butter, or other packers' jars. Such jars are not heat tempered and often break during heat processing. Have the jars clean and hot when packing them prior to heat processing. Thoroughly wash, scald, and keep the jars hot or if you have a dishwasher, put the jars through the complete cycle.

Two-piece, self-sealing lids are the most widely used type of sealing device. The lids can be used only once. If you are using zinc lids, make sure you have new rubber rings.

For Processing the Pickles

Water bath canner—All pickle products should be heat processed in a boiling water bath canner to destroy yeast, molds, and bacteria that cause product spoilage and to inactivate enzymes that may affect color, flavor, and texture of the pickle product. Heat processing pickles also insures a good seal on the jar.

Any pot deep enough to allow jars standing on a rack to be covered by 1 inch of boiling water may be used as a water bath canner.

Quarts of pickles should be heat processed for 10 minutes at simmering temperatures (200° - 205° F.).

Jar lifters.

Tongs for handling the hot lids and bands.

Potholders or mitts.

Wooden boards or folded newspapers on which to place hot jars.

DIRECTIONS AND RECIPES

Recipes for each type of nonfermented pickle product follow. Cookbooks are sources of many other recipes, but be sure to follow the guidelines for ingredients and heat processing in this fact sheet.

Fresh Pack or Quick Dill Pickles

There is no quantity of pickles given as this recipe may be used for several quarts or several dozen quarts of pickles. The amount of brine given in the recipe is sufficient for about 6 quarts of pickles. Larger or smaller amounts of brine may be prepared, but be sure to keep the correct proportions of water, salt, vinegar.

Pickling cucumbers 2½ to 3 inches in length

Brine: 6 cups water

2 cups vinegar, 4 to 6 percent acidity

½ cup canning salt

Dill heads, washed

Onion slices, ½ inch thick

Garlic cloves

Carrot slices (optional—for added color)

- Wash and scrub the cucumbers carefully.
- Place 1 or 2 garlic cloves, slice of onion, carrot, and head of dill into the bottom of a quart canning jar.
- Put the cucumbers into the clean, hot jars.
- Have two-piece lids, lid and screwband, in boiling water.
- Cover with boiling hot brine to within ½ inch of the top of the jar. Wipe rim of jar.
- Place lid on jar, screw metal band on tightly by hand.
- Have water boiling in water bath canner.
- Process jars in simmering water bath at 200° - 205° F. for 10 minutes. Count processing time when water returns to simmer.
- Remove jars. Do not tighten screw bands.
- Set jars upright several inches apart on wire rack or wooden board to cool.

Spicy Bread and Butter Pickles

3 quarts cucumbers, medium size, sliced

8 onions, small, sliced

½ cup salt, canning

1 pint vinegar, 4 to 6 percent acidity

1 cup sugar

1 tsp. celery seeds

1 tsp. mustard seeds

1 tsp. ginger, ground

1 tsp. peppercorns

1 tsp. tumeric

1 tsp. cinnamon

- Sprinkle sliced cucumbers and onion with canning salt and let stand 1 hour.
- Drain the liquid from these vegetables.

- Make hot syrup of the sugar, vinegar, and spices. Bring the syrup to a boil.

- Add drained cucumbers and onions to the hot syrup and bring to a boil again.

- Pack into clean, hot pint jars to within ½ inch of top. Wipe rim of the jar.

- Adjust jar lid as in fresh pack dills.

- Have water boiling in canner.

- Process in simmering water bath at 200° - 205° F. for 5 minutes. Count process time when water returns to a simmer.

- Set the jars upright several inches apart on a wire rack or wooden board to cool.

Yield: 4 to 5 pints.

Pepper Relish

4 cups onions, ground

4 cups cabbage, ground

4 cups green tomatoes, ground

9 large green peppers, ground

9 large red peppers, ground

½ cup salt

6 cups sugar

4 cups vinegar—4 to 6 percent acidity

2 cups water

1 tbsp. celery seed

1 tbsp. mustard seed

1½ tsp. tumeric

- Mix the ground vegetables with salt and let stand overnight in the refrigerator.

- Rinse and drain the vegetables.

- Add sugar, vinegar, water, spices.

- Heat the mixture to boiling then simmer for 3 minutes.

- Put the relish into clean, hot pint jars. Fill to within ½ inch of top.

- Adjust jar lid as in fresh pack dills.

- Have water boiling in canner.

- Process in simmering water at 200° - 205° F. for 5 minutes.

- Set the jars upright several inches apart on a wire rack or wooden board to cool.

Yield: 4 to 5 pints

Watermelon Pickles

6 pounds or ½ large watermelon rind, unpared

¼ cup salt, canning type

3 quarts water

2 quarts (2 trays) ice cubes

8 cups (2¼ quarts) sugar

3 cups vinegar, white

3 cups water

1 tbsp. (about 48) whole cloves

6, 1-inch pieces stick cinnamon

1 lemon, thinly sliced, with seeds removed

- Pare rind and all pink edges from the watermelon. Cut into 1-inch squares or fancy shapes as desired. Cover with brine made by mixing the salt with 3 quarts cold water. Add ice cubes. Let stand 5 to 6 hours.

- Drain; rinse with cold water. Cover with cold water and cook until fork tender, about 10 minutes (do not overcook). Drain.

- Combine sugar, vinegar, water, and spices (tied in a clean, thin, white cloth). Boil 5 minutes and pour over the watermelon with spices; add lemon slices. Let stand overnight.

- Heat watermelon in syrup to boiling and cook until watermelon is translucent (about 10 minutes). Pack hot pickles loosely into clean, hot pint jars. To each jar add 1 piece of stick cinnamon from spice bag; cover with boiling syrup to within ½ inch of top. Adjust jar lids as in fresh pack dills.

- Process in simmering water bath at 200° - 205° F. for 5 minutes. Remove jars and complete seals if necessary. Set jars upright, several inches apart, on a wire rack to cool.