



Crispy and Delicious Homemade Pickles

Pickling is a long-time favorite among home canners. While cucumbers are the most popular pickled product, many other vegetables and fruits can be successfully pickled at home. You can make safe, high-quality pickles if you remember to use high quality ingredients and follow a tested recipe precisely.

There are two general types of pickles: fermented pickles, sometimes called crock pickles, and fresh-pack quick-process pickles. Cucumbers can be fermented in a crock to produce genuine

dill pickles. Fermenting

genuine dill pickles takes 3 to 4 weeks at 70°F. The fermentation process allows bacteria to produce lactic acid, which preserves the cucumbers and produces the characteristic color and texture of genuine dills. If you don't want to tackle genuine dills, then fresh-pack quick process pickles can be a good alternative. Fresh pack or quick process pickles are quick and easy to prepare. Vegetables or fruits are packed in jars, covered with a hot vinegar solution and immediately heat processed.

Regardless of the type of pickle that you choose to make, always start with high quality ingredients. Discard bruised, moldy or insect-damaged produce. If you are making cucumber pickles, use varieties that are designed for pickling. Wax-coated cucumbers bought from supermarkets or eating varieties sold at farm markets are not suitable for making high quality pickles. For best quality, pickle fruits or vegetables within 24 hours of harvest, or refrigerate for no more than a few days. Remove all blossoms from cucumbers and cut a 1/16-inch slice from the blossom end. The blossoms contain enzymes that can cause softening of the final product.

Other ingredients that are important in preparing safe, high quality pickles are water, salt, and vinegar (for fresh pack pickles). Softened water is recommended for pickling to avoid the off-color or off-flavors that result from using hard water. Use commercial vinegar of five percent acidity, either white or cider vinegar as directed in the recipe. Do not use homemade vinegar or other acids such as lemon juice unless directed in the recipe. Salt is very important for pickle quality. Canning and pickling salt—pure granulated salt—is recommended for all kinds of pickles. This salt is pure, without anticaking agents that will cloud the pickling solution and leave sediment on the bottom of the jar. Never alter salt concentrations when making fermented pickles, as an unsafe or spoiled product may result. In addition to these main ingredients, sugar, spices, garlic and dill may be added to give special flavor and zest to pickle recipes.

You may remember Grandma soaking cucumbers in lime or alum before pickling. This is no longer recommended and, indeed, it isn't necessary if you use freshly picked cucumbers, follow an up-to-date tested recipe, and heat process pickles for the correct length of time. Your pickles will turn out crisp and you won't need to add firming agents. For a quick and easy way to help ensure crisp pickles: soak cucumbers in ice water for 4 to 5 hours before pickling. This is a safer method for making crisp pickles. Using lime, or calcium hydroxide, in solution for soaking cucumbers changes the amount of acid in the cucumber tissue. If too much lime is used, or if the cucumbers aren't rinsed properly, then the acid in the recipe might not be sufficient to counteract the effect of the lime and an unsafe product may result.

As with other canned foods, always follow a tested recipe exactly. Carefully select ingredients, and always heat process to ensure a good seal. Leave the creativity behind when home canning, and the quality and safety of the food that you serve will be much higher.

For more information and recipes, see *Homemade Pickles and Relishes* (B2267), which is part of The Wisconsin Safe Food Preservation Series by Barbara Ingham. Others in the series include *Canning Fruits Safely* (B0430), *Making Jams, Jellies and Preserves* (B2909), *Freezing Fruits and Vegetables* (B3278), *Canning Vegetables Safely* (B1159), *Canning Salsa Safely* (B3570), *Tomatoes Tart and Tasty* (B2605), and *Canning Meat, Wild Game, Poultry and Fish Safely* (B3345). These and other gardening and food preserva-

tion publications are available from Winnebago County UW-Extension office or from Cooperative Extension Publications (877-947-7827) and online at <http://cecommerce.uwex.edu>.

There is a fee for publications; some are printable online free of charge.

Homemade Pickle and Relish Recipes Quick-pack dill pickles

8 pounds pickling cucumbers, 3 to 5 inches long

2 gallons water

3/4 cups canning and pickling salt

Pickling solution:

1-1/2 quarts vinegar (5% acetic acid)

1/2 cup canning and pickling salt

1/4 cup sugar

2 quarts water

2 tbsp whole mixed pickling spice

3-4 tbsp whole mustard seed (1 tsp per pint jar)

10-12 fresh dill heads, washed (1-1/2 heads per pint jar), or 1 tbsp dill seed or dill weed per pint jar

1 or 2 garlic cloves per jar, peeled (optional)

1. Wash cucumbers carefully, cut 1/16-inch off blossom end and discard or wash squash well.

Cut into 3/16-inch slices. Combine cucumbers or squash and sliced onions in a large bowl.

Add salt. Cover with 2 inches crushed or cubed ice. Refrigerate 3 to 4 hours, adding more ice as needed. Drain.

2. Add sugar and remaining ingredients to vinegar in a large kettle. Bring to a boil, and boil 10 minutes. Add well-drained cucumbers or squash and onions and slowly reheat to boiling.

3. Fill pint or quart jars with slices, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Fill to 1/2 inch from top with hot pickling solution. Remove bubbles with a rubber spatula. Wipe jar rims clean.

4. Cap jars with pretreated lids and tighten each screw band until just firmly tight. Place filled jars in actively boiling water in a boiling water canner.

5. Process in a boiling water canner; 15 minutes for pints or quarts.

Yield: 7 to 9 pints



Kristi Cutts, Family Living Educator
UW-Extension, Winnebago County
625 E. County Rd. Y, Suite 600
Oshkosh WI 54901

Telephone: (920) 232-1973
e-mail: kristi.cutts@ces.uwex.edu
Website: www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/winnebago/
Publications: <http://http://learningstore.uwex.edu/>

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