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DIY Canning: Pickles & Relishes

What could be better than crisp and tangy pickled vegetables made from your own garden's bounty and canned in your own kitchen? A creative way to enjoy summer produce, pickled vegetables are wonderful as side dishes, in salads and more. Relishes also add a special touch to our plates.

Basics of Pickling

Preserving foods by pickling dates back thousands of years. Over the centuries, it has emerged in numerous cultures around the world and taken a wide range of forms. The motivation to pickle came from a common goal: to preserve for future consumption. Nowadays, the technique is still used to capture harvest's bounty and ensure ample food for winter. Here are some guidelines for pickling at home, and the key ingredients involved.

Produce: An easy way to think about handling produce for pickling is to remember the two Fs: fresh and fast. Produce pickled at its peak of freshness will invariably yield the best result. The freshest produce will also have the most crispy texture, necessary for a good pickle. Vegetables grown in your own garden make the most delicious pickles, and preserving ingredients you have grown yourself inspires a sense of pride. Otherwise, look to the farmers' market for fresh vegetables to pickle, avoiding ones with blemishes or soft areas. Fast is equally important—make your pickles as soon as possible after picking or purchasing your produce. Maintaining the integrity of the vegetables is an important factor in the pickling process.

Flavorings: The combination of a vegetable (or fruit), a vinegar and pickling spice defines the pickler's palette. But it is perhaps the pickling spice—the unique and flavorful mix of herbs and spices added to the brine—that plays the most creative and distinctive role. Different combinations of herbs and spices help create pickles with distinctive flavors, and experimenting with these elements is where you can make your mark as a pickler. As you gain confidence, alter recipes to suit your tastes. Remember to record your modifications so that when you hit on something you like, you can easily do it again.

Pickling spice is a bit like barbecue sauce; everyone has a personal style and taste preference. For an aromatic approach, you might include as many as 6 or 8 spices—such as whole

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Dilly Beans

While you prepare the beans, wash 8 pint canning jars with their lids and rings in hot soapy water and rinse them, then place in a large pan or bowl and cover with boiling water. Keep them in the hot water until ready to use. Remove the jars from the water and pour out any water. Arrange the jars together for easy filling. At the same time, fill a large pot (large enough to hold the jars in a single layer) with warm water to a depth of 4 inches. A canning kettle with a rack is ideal.

Trim the ends off the beans, then cut them into lengths to fit in your jars. Divide the dill seeds, mustard seeds and peppercorns between the jars. Pack the beans upright in the jars, leaving about ½ inch of headspace. Tuck a dill sprig in each jar.

Put the vinegar, wine, water, salt and sugar in a pot, set over high heat and bring to a boil. Boil, stirring until the salt and sugar have dissolved. Pour the hot liquid into the jars over the beans, leaving about ½ inch of headspace.

Using a paper towel dipped in hot water, wipe the rims clean. Place the lid on each jar, then screw on the rings. Arrange the jars in the water in the pot (the water should cover the jars by 2 inches) and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Boil for 10 minutes.

Using tongs, remove the jars from the water and place on a tray lined with a kitchen towel. Let the jars cool undisturbed for 12 hours. If the jars have sealed properly, the lids will be slightly indented and not springy to the touch. If a jar did not seal properly, either repeat the water bath process or refrigerate and use the beans. Makes 8 pints.

Recipe by Canal House Cooking

4 lb. yellow wax beans
4 tsp. dill seeds
4 tsp. mustard seeds
10 whole black peppercorns
8 large fresh dill sprigs
5 cups white wine vinegar
2 cups white wine
3 cups water
1 Tbs. kosher salt
2 Tbs. sugar



Sweet Pickle Relish

If you have a garden overflowing with cucumbers, this classic relish is a good way to use your bumper crop. You can dice the vegetables in a food processor or by hand. If you opt for the food processor, don't overprocess them or the relish will lose its chunky texture.

In a large nonreactive bowl, combine the cucumbers, onion and bell peppers. Pour the salt over the cucumber mixture, add enough cold water to cover and stir gently to mix. Cover and let stand at room temperature for at least 6 hours or up to 1 day.

Have ready 4 hot, sterilized one-pint jars and their lids.

Drain the cucumber mixture in a colander. Rinse thoroughly and drain again. Transfer to a large nonreactive saucepan and add the sugar, vinegar, celery seeds and mustard seeds. Place the allspice on a square of cheesecloth, bring the corners together and tie securely with kitchen string. Add the cheesecloth bag to the cucumber mixture and stir to mix well. Set over medium-high heat and bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, uncovered, stirring frequently, for 10 minutes. Discard the cheesecloth bag.

Ladle the hot relish into the jars, leaving ¼ inch of headspace. Remove any air bubbles and adjust the headspace, if necessary. Wipe the rims clean and seal tightly with the lids.

Process the jars in a boiling-water bath for 10 minutes. The sealed jars can be stored in a cool, dark place for up to 1 year. If a seal has failed, store the jar in the refrigerator for up to 1 month. Makes 4 pints.

Adapted from *The Art of Preserving*, by Lisa Atwood, Rebecca Courchesne & Rick Field (Weldon Owen, 2010).

2½ lb. cucumbers, finely diced
1 sweet onion, such as Vidalia or Rio Sweet, finely diced
1 yellow bell pepper, seeded and finely diced
1 red bell pepper, seeded and finely diced
¼ cup kosher salt
3 cups sugar
2 cups cider vinegar
1 Tbs. celery seeds
1 Tbs. brown mustard seeds
2 tsp. whole allspice

allspice, peppercorns, dill or mustard seeds and bay leaves. You can purchase pickling spice blends or make your own. As a starting point, try our Homemade Pickling Spice recipe.

Salt: Salt is a key ingredient in a wide range of pickling methods. In many brines, salt tempers the balance of flavors, as it also does when you add salt to food at the table. In some cases, salt helps draw water out of vegetables, such as cucumbers, to improve their texture. Kosher salt and pickling salt, which are nearly identical, are the two main types of salt used for making shelf-stable pickles. Do not substitute common table salt. Some people add a lot of salt to brines in order to achieve a pronounced salty flavor—but the subtleties of spices, herbs and citrus can generate equally distinctive final results.

Acids: Acids are a vital element in making shelf-stable pickles. Properly sealed jars of pickles can remain on the shelf for a long period of time because they have achieved an acceptable level of acidification, the pH of the contents (pickles and brine) has been stabilized, and all bacteria have been eradicated.

Acid in pickling takes two forms: vinegar and citric acid. Vinegar, an acetic acid, works on pickled vegetables to stabilize their pH levels. Different vinegars have different degrees of strength, or grain. Most vinegars commonly used in pickling have a grain strength of 5 or 6 percent. Avoid using vinegars with a grain strength lower than what the recipe requires, as this may result in pickles that don't acidify properly. Citric acid takes the form of juice from citrus: lemon, lime and orange. It brightens and embellishes the flavors of pickles and complements other ingredients, but it doesn't usually provide the basis for acidification.

Heat penetration is another factor in acidification. Brines are brought to a boil (212°F) and poured quickly into jars before their temperature drops below 195°F, which typically takes a few minutes. Jars remain in the boiling-water bath for a specified length of time to ensure that the core temperature of the contents reaches a level that will kill any form of bacteria present. If the jars have been properly sealed, the combination of vinegar and heat penetration will reliably kill bacteria and the contents will be safe to eat.

Types of Savory Preserved Foods

Vegetables can be preserved in a variety of ways—pickled, pureed into a sauce, or diced and spiced. Here are some methods of preserving savory ingredients:

- **Pickles:** Fruits or vegetables preserved in a brine composed of an acid (such as vinegar), salt and a mix of spices.
- **Relish:** Diced produce—such as onions, cucumbers, tomatoes, eggplant or cranberries—pickled in vinegar.
- **Chutney:** Chopped or crushed vegetables or fruits mixed with spices in a coarse texture, often sweet tasting or spicy hot.
- **Salsa:** Typically coarsely chopped produce combined with herbs for a fresh tasting and zingy dip or topping.
- **Condiment or Sauce:** Smooth or slightly chunky spread made by reducing vegetables and fruits and used as a topping, marinade or rub.



1 cinnamon stick, broken into pieces
2 dried bay leaves, crushed
2 whole cloves
2 Tbs. mustard seeds
2 Tbs. whole coriander seeds
1 Tbs. mixed peppercorns
2 tsp. whole allspice
2 tsp. dill seeds
1 tsp. red pepper flakes

Homemade Pickling Spice

Experiment with different flavor profiles when blending your own pickling spice, and be sure to note all of the combinations you try. Whatever aromatic notes you find appealing, increase; those that seem as if they are interfering, decrease. This recipe is a good starting point.

In a small bowl, combine the cinnamon stick, bay leaves, cloves, mustard seeds, coriander seeds, peppercorns, allspice, dill seeds and red pepper flakes. Store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 1 year.

Adapted from *The Art of Preserving*, by Lisa Atwood, Rebecca Courchesne & Rick Field (Weldon Owen, 2010).

3 cups distilled white vinegar
2 Tbs. kosher salt
6 Tbs. Williams-Sonoma pickling spices
6 Tbs. dill seeds
24 fresh dill sprigs
6 lb. cucumbers, cut into slices ½ inch thick
1 small white onion, cut lengthwise into thin slices

Classic Dill Pickle

These homemade pickles are prepared with a brine that includes our pickling spices, a classic English blend of aromatic allspice, coriander, yellow mustard, fennel and bay leaves; cayenne and black pepper add a hint of zesty heat.

Have ready 6 hot, sterilized one-pint canning jars and their lids.

In a large nonreactive saucepan over medium-high heat, combine the vinegar and salt. Add 3 cups water and bring to a boil, stirring to dissolve the salt.

Meanwhile, in each jar, place 1 Tbs. pickling spices, 1 Tbs. dill seeds and 4 dill sprigs. Layer the cucumber and onion slices in the jars, packing them tightly and avoiding large gaps. Fill the jars to within ¾ inch of the rims.

Ladle the hot brine into the jars, leaving ½ inch of headspace. Remove any air bubbles and adjust the headspace, if necessary. Wipe the rims clean and seal tightly with the lids.

To process the jars, put the sealed jars in a large deep pot and add enough water to cover by 2 inches. Bring the water to a boil, cover the pot and boil the jars for 7 minutes, taking care that they are submerged at all times. Using long-handled tongs, transfer to a towel-lined surface to cool.

Let the jars stand undisturbed for 24 hours and then set them aside for 2 weeks to allow the flavors to develop. The sealed jars can be stored in a cool, dark place for up to 1 year. If a seal has failed, store the jar in the refrigerator for up to 1 week. Makes 6 pints.

Adapted from a recipe by Williams-Sonoma