Pickles are one of the favorites of home canners, and pickling is among the oldest known methods of preserving food, dating back to Biblical times. Today, pickles are great for snacks and are the perfect companion for sandwiches.

When we speak of pickles, many of us think only of cucumbers. But in canning terms, pickles include any fruit, meat or vegetable prepared by a pickling process, as well as a wide variety of relishes. Pickle products are either fermented in brine (salt) or packed in vinegar to aid preservation.

Many older recipes called for pickles to be packed into jars and sealed without processing. This method is no longer recommended. There is always a danger of harmful microorganisms entering the food when it is transferred from pickling container to jar.

Processing destroys organisms that can cause spoilage and inactivates enzymes that may affect flavor, color and texture.

Pickle products are generally grouped into four classes:

**Brined pickles**—Also called fermented pickles. The vegetables are submerged in a brine solution to ferment or cure for about three weeks. Dilled cucumbers and sauerkraut belong to this group. Herbs and spices are often added to the solution for flavoring.

**Fresh-pack pickles**—Quick-process pickles canned in a spicy vinegar solution without brining, but usually soaked for several hours or overnight.

**Relishes**—Prepared from fruits and/or vegetables that are chopped and cooked to desired consistency in a spicy vinegar solution. If a sweet relish is desired, sugar can be added. Hot peppers or other spices make a hot relish.

**Fruit pickles**—Prepared from whole fruits and simmered in a spicy, sweet-sour syrup.
Top-Quality Ingredients — The Key to Successful Pickling

Pickling is one area of canning where it is essential to have top-quality ingredients and to follow proper procedures carefully to achieve satisfactory results. The ingredients and procedures may be right, but if the correct proportions of sugar, salt, vinegar and spices are not maintained, the quality will likely suffer.

Fruits and vegetables—should be fresh from the garden. If possible they should be picked no more than 24 hours before pickling. Cucumbers, especially, deteriorate rapidly at room temperatures.

Salt—Brine solutions should be carefully prepared. Pure salt or pickling salt should be used. Uniodized salt may make brine cloudy. Iodized table salt should not be used as it may darken pickles. Salt acts as a preservative and adds flavor and crispness; therefore, it is not advisable to use less salt or reduced-sodium salts. Brine draws juices and sugars from foods and forms lactic acid, a preservative. If a low-salt pickle is desired, check with your Extension agent for recipes.

Vinegar—Gives a tart taste and acts as a preservative. Use a high-grade cider or white distilled vinegar no less than 5 percent acidity. If a less sour product is preferred, add sugar rather than decrease vinegar. Changing these proportions will change the preservative balance.

Sugar—Use white granulated sugar, unless the recipe calls for another sweetener. Brown sugar darkens the product.

Spices and herbs—Flavor pickles. Only fresh spices and herbs should be used. Whole fresh spices are preferred. The dry powdered and salt forms may cloud the pickling mixture. Spices lose pungency readily in heat and humidity. Spices should be stored in airtight containers and kept in a cool place.

Water—Soft water should be used in making brine. The minerals in hard water will have a negative effect on the quality of pickles.

If soft water is not available, soften by boiling for 15 minutes. Let it stand for 24 hours. A scum will likely appear on top of water. Carefully skim it off. Ladle water from container, do not disturb sediment on bottom. Add 1 tablespoon of vinegar per gallon of boiled water before using.

Some older recipes call for the use of alum and/or lime to add crispness or firmness to pickles. If the proper ingredients are used, these items are unnecessary. Pickle making begins with the brine, and a brine that is made carelessly or maintained carelessly is the reason for most of the soft and unfit pickles.

Be sure to follow basic canning steps and recipes.

Utensils

To heat pickling liquids, use unchipped enamelware, stainless steel or nonstick coated material. Do not use copper, brass, galvanized or iron utensils.

For fermenting or brining, use a crock, plastic food-safe container, stone jar, unchipped enamel-lined pan, large glass jar or bowl. Use a plate with a weight or a plastic bag filled with water to hold the vegetables below the surface of the brine.

Small utensils—Measuring cups and spoons, sharp knives, tongs, vegetable peeler, ladle with a lip for pouring, slotted spoon, trays, footed colander or wire basket, wide-mouth funnel, food chopper or grinder, cutting board. You can get by with less, but these add ease and convenience.

Scales—Household scales will be needed if the recipes specify ingredients by weight. They are
necessary in making sauerkraut to ensure correct proportions of salt and shredded cabbage.

**Jars and lids**—Free of cracks, chips, dents or any defects. Wash in hot soapy water and rinse thoroughly before filling. Follow manufacturers directions on lids.

Water-bath canner should be deep enough to allow at least 1 inch of water above tops of the jars.

Remember these key points:

- Use clean jars.
- Use only a recommended pickling variety of cucumbers. Don't use burpless cucumbers because enzymes make pickles slimy and soft.
- Use pure granulated salt.
- Do not use hard water.

**Fresh-Pack Dill Pickles**

Yield: 7 quarts

7-10 cucumbers (3-5 inches long) per quart  
About 2 gallons 5-percent brine (¼ cup pure granulated salt per gallon of water)  
1½ quarts vinegar  
¾ cup salt, pure granulated  
¼ cup sugar  
2¼ quarts water  
2 tablespoons whole mixed pickling spice  
2 teaspoons whole mustard seed per quart jar  
1 or 2 cloves garlic per quart jar, if desired  
3 heads dill plant, fresh or dried, per quart jar  or 1 tablespoon dill seed per quart jar  

Wash cucumbers thoroughly; scrub with vegetable brush; drain. Cover with the 5-percent brine. Let sit overnight; drain.

Combine vinegar, salt, sugar, water and mixed pickling spices that are tied in a clean, thin, white cloth; heat to boiling. Pack cucumbers into clean, hot quart jars. Add mustard seed, dill plant or seed. Process for 5 minutes in a boiling water canner for altitudes under 1,000 feet, 10 minutes for 1,001 to 6,000 feet and 15 minutes for 6,001 to 8,000 feet.

**Piccalilli**

Yield: 3 pints

1 quart green tomatoes, chopped  
1 cup sweet red pepper, chopped  
1 cup green pepper, chopped  
1½ cups chopped onion  
5 cups (about 2 pounds) cabbage, chopped  
½ cup salt  
3 cups vinegar  
2 cups brown sugar, packed  
2 tablespoons whole mixed pickling spice  

Combine vegetables, mix with salt, let stand overnight. Drain and press in a clean, thin, white cloth to remove all liquid possible. Do not change proportions of vegetables as these are matched to amount of acid.

Combine vinegar and sugar. Place spices loosely in a clean cloth; tie with a string. Add to vinegar mixture. Bring to a boil.

Add vegetables, bring to a boil and boil gently about 30 minutes, or until mixture is reduced one-half in volume. Remove spice bag. Pack hot relish into clean, hot pint jars. Fill jars to ½ inch from top. Adjust lids.

Process in boiling water for 5 minutes (start to count processing time as soon as water in canner returns to boiling) for altitudes under 1,000 feet, ten minutes for 1,001 to 6,000 feet and 15 minutes for 6,001 to 8,000 feet.

Remove jars from canner. Set jars upright on a wire rack or folded towel to cool. Place them several inches apart.
Crosscut Pickle Slices

Yield: 7 pints

4 quarts (about 6 pounds) medium-size cucumbers, sliced
1 1/2 cups (about 1 pound) small white onions, sliced
2 large garlic cloves
1/2 cup salt
2 quarts (2 trays) ice, crushed or cubes
4 1/2 cups sugar
1 1/2 teaspoons turmeric
1 1/2 teaspoons celery seed
2 tablespoons mustard seed
3 cups white vinegar

Wash cucumbers thoroughly, using a vegetable brush; drain on rack. Slice unpeeled cucumbers into 1/8-inch to 1/2-inch slices; discard ends. Add onions and garlic.

Add salt and mix thoroughly; cover with crushed ice or ice cubes; let stand 3 hours. Drain thoroughly; remove garlic cloves.

Combine sugar, spices and vinegar; heat just to boiling. Add drained cucumber and onion slices and heat 5 minutes.

Pack hot pickles loosely into clean, hot pint jars and cover with hot liquid to 1/2 inch from top. Adjust jar lids.

Process in boiling water for 5 minutes (start to count processing time as soon as water in canner returns to boiling). Increase processing to 10 minutes at altitudes from 1,001 to 6,000 feet. Remove jars and complete seals if necessary. Set jars upright on wire rack or folded towel to cool. Place them several inches apart.

References


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Roxie Rodgers Dinstel, Associate Director of Extension.