

In a Pickle

Pickles are created by immersing fresh fruits or vegetables in an acidic liquid or saltwater brine until they are no longer considered raw or vulnerable to spoilage. When we think of pickles, cucumbers commonly come to mind. Pickled cucumbers are often lacto-fermented in saltwater brine. During this process lactic microbial organisms develop, which turn the naturally occurring sugars of foods into lactic acid. In turn, the environment becomes acidic quickly, making it impossible for any spoiling bacteria to multiply.



PICKLING IS THOUSANDS OF YEARS OLD. Cucumbers, which are native to India, were first brought to the Tigris Valley and pickled way back in 2030 B.C.—although preserving food in a vinegar or brine solution may stretch back even further with the Mesopotamians.

WE EAT A LOT OF PICKLES.

About 9 pounds of pickles per person every year. The most popular type remains kosher dill.

CLEOPATRA USED THEM TO PRESERVE HER GOOD LOOKS ...

Cleopatra was supposedly a pickle devotee. She ate them regularly, believing that they helped keep her gorgeous.

PICKLES ARE CURED IN OPEN, OUTDOOR VATS.

Cucumber pickle factories usually ferment cucumbers in large outdoor vats of salt brine. Surprisingly, these vats have no cover, and are wide open to falling bird droppings, insects, and other airborne objects.

How To Quick Pickle Any Vegetable

YIELD - Makes 2, pint jars; PREP TIME - 20 minutes; COOK TIME - 5 minutes

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound fresh vegetables, such as cucumbers, carrots, green beans, summer squash, or cherry tomatoes
- 2 sprigs fresh herbs, such as thyme, dill, or rosemary (optional)
- 1 to 2 teaspoons whole spices, such as black peppercorns, coriander, or mustard seeds (optional)
- 1 teaspoon dried herbs or ground spices (optional)
- 2 cloves garlic, smashed or sliced (optional)
- 1 cup vinegar, such as white, apple cider, or rice
- 1 cup water
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt, or 2 teaspoons pickling salt
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar (optional)



EQUIPMENT

- Chef's knife and cutting board
- 2 wide-mouth pint jars with lids
- Canning funnel (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Prepare the jars. Wash 2 wide-mouth pint jars, lids, and rings in warm, soapy water and rinse well. Set aside to dry, or dry completely by hand.
2. Prepare the vegetables. Wash and dry the vegetables. Peel the carrots. Trim the end of beans. Cut vegetables into desired shapes and sizes.
3. Add the flavorings. Divide the herbs, spices, or garlic you are using between the jars.
4. Add the vegetables. Pack the vegetables into the jars, making sure there is a 1/2 inch of space from the rim of the jar to the tops of the vegetables. Pack them in as tightly as you can without smashing.
5. Make the brine. Place the vinegar, water, salt, and sugar (if using) in a small saucepan over high heat. Bring to a boil, stirring to dissolve the salt and sugar. Pour the brine over the vegetables, filling each jar to within 1/2 inch of the top. You might not use all the brine.
6. Remove air bubbles. Gently tap the jars against the counter a few times to remove all the air bubbles. Top off with more brine if necessary.
7. Seal the jars. Place the lids on the jars and screw on the rings until tight.
8. Cool and refrigerate. Let the jars cool to room temperature. Store the pickles in the refrigerator. The pickles will improve with flavor as they age — try to wait at least 48 hours before cracking them open.

RECIPE NOTES

Storage: These pickles are not canned. They can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 2 months. If you process and can the jars, they can be stored at room temperature unopened.