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PICKLES

Brined pickles, also called fermented pickles, go through a curing process of about 3 weeks. Curing changes cucumber color from a bright green to an olive or yellow green. The interior of the cucumber becomes uniformly translucent. A desirable flavor is developed. The skin of the pickle is tender and firm; not hard, rubbery, or shriveled. The inside is tender and firm; not soft or mushy.

Fresh-pack or quick-process pickles are brined for several hours or overnight, then drained and combined with boiling-hot vinegar, spices, and other seasonings. These are quick and easy to prepare. They have a tart, pungent flavor. Fresh-pack whole cucumbers are olive green, crisp, tender, and firm.

The fruit or vegetable from which pickles are made should be of good quality, firm in texture, and free from bruises, decay, or mold. Over-mature fruits and vegetables will shrivel during the pickling procedure. Use fruits and vegetables as soon as possible. If there is a delay of more than a few hours, refrigerate. Use unwaxed cucumbers for pickling whole so the brine can penetrate.

Wash thoroughly. Be sure to remove all blossoms from cucumbers as they may contain enzymes which cause softening of cucumbers. Sort for uniform size.

Correct proportions of fruit or vegetable, sugar, salt, vinegar, and spices are essential for successful pickling. Alum and lime are not needed to make pickles crisp and firm.

Vinegar serves two purposes in pickle making - that of preserving the product and modifying its taste. The addition of water weakens the vinegar. If a less sour product is preferred, add sugar rather than decrease vinegar.

Use a cider or white distilled vinegar of 4- to 6-percent acidity. Cider vinegar, with its mellow acid taste, gives a nice blending of flavors but may darken white or light-colored fruits and vegetables. White distilled vinegar has a sharp, pungent, acetic acid taste and is desirable when light color is important.

Either white granulated or brown sugar may be used. White sugar gives a product with a lighter color.

Use fresh spices for best flavor.

Use pure salt. Table salt can be used but the materials added to prevent caking may make the brine cloudy.

Heat processing is recommended for all pickle products to destroy organisms that cause spoilage and to inactivate enzymes that may affect flavor, color, and texture.

Dark pickles may be the result of minerals in water, especially iron, using iron utensils, too much spice, ground spice, or cooking too long with spices, or iodized salt.

CROSS CUT PICKLE SLICES

4 quarts sliced cucumbers (about 6
pounds medium-sized cucumbers)
1 1/2 cups sliced onions

Yield: 7 pints

2 large garlic cloves
1/2 cup salt
2 quarts crushed or cube ice

4 1/2 cups sugar	2 tablespoons mustard seed
1 1/2 teaspoons turmeric	3 cups white vinegar
1 1/2 teaspoons celery seed	

Wash cucumbers thoroughly, using a vegetable brush. Drain. Slice unpeeled cucumbers into 1/8- to 1/4-inch slices; discard ends. Add onions and garlic.

Add salt and mix thoroughly; cover with ice; 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. Fill to 1/2-inch of top with pickling mixture. Adjust jar lids.

Process in boiling water bath canner for 5 minutes. Wait until water returns to boiling to start counting processing time. Remove jars from canner and set upright on a wire rack to cool.

BRINED DILL PICKLES

Yield: 9 to 10 quarts

20 pounds cucumbers, 3 to 6 inches in length	2 1/2 cups vinegar
3/4 cup whole mixed pickling spice	1 3/4 cups salt
2 to 3 bunches dill plant, fresh or dried	2 1/2 gallons water

Wash cucumbers thoroughly but gently with a vegetable brush. Drain.

Place half of the pickling spice and of the dill in a 5-gallon crock or glass jar. Fill with cucumbers to within 3 or 4 inches of the top. Put remainder of pickling spice and dill on top of cucumbers. Combine vinegar, salt, and water, and pour over the cucumbers.

Cover with a china or glass plate. Use a weight to keep the cucumbers under the brine. Cover loosely with a clean cloth. Keep at room temperature. Scum may start forming in 3 to 5 days and should be removed daily. Do not stir pickles, but be sure they are completely covered with brine. If necessary, make additional brine using original proportions specified in recipe.

In about 3 weeks the cucumbers will have become olive-green in color and should have a desirable flavor. Any white spots inside the fermented cucumbers will disappear in processing.

The original brine may become cloudy as a result of yeast development. If this cloudiness is objectionable, fresh brine may be used to cover the pickles when packing them into jars. For the fresh brine, use 1/2 cup salt, 4 cups vinegar and 1 gallon water.

Pack the pickles, along with some of the dill, into clean, hot jars; add garlic, if desired. Cover with boiling hot brine leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Adjust jar lids.

Process in boiling water bath canner for 15 minutes. Start to count processing time as soon as jars are placed into the actively boiling water. At end of processing time, remove jars and set upright on a wire rack to cool.

MF-132 Canning and Freezing - General Information has information about processing in a pressure canner and in a boiling water bath canner.

Information adapted from USDA Home and Garden Bulletins by Jo Anne Barton, Extension Specialist, Foods and Nutrition.

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