

TWO WAYS TO PICKLE: QUICK PICKLES VS. BOILING WATER BATH PICKLING

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There are essentially two ways to go about pickling:

1. **Quick-Pickling:** A fast and simple process, quick-pickling is as simple as putting your vegetables in a pickling solution and waiting a bit. Quick pickles (aka “refrigerator pickles”) will last for several weeks to several months in the refrigerator. This process is best for pickles that you know you will be eating and enjoy within a short period of time because they will lose their crunch the longer they remain in the brine.
2. **The Boiling Water Bath Method:** In this process, jars of prepared food are heated in a boiling water bath for a specific amount of time. Food that is processed correctly and stored properly should be safe for one year. Once the food has been opened, refrigerate as you would any other fresh food.

IS PROCESSING PICKLES NECESSARY?

If you wish to store your jars of product at room temperature (in the pantry), then heat treatment is necessary and will destroy micro-organisms that cause spoilage. Heat treatment will also inactivate the enzymes that affect flavor, color, and texture of your product during storage.

GET READY TO PICKLE!

No matter what method you choose, pickles should be made with young, fresh vegetables. Do not use waxed supermarket cucumbers for pickling because the acid or salt will not penetrate them properly. Either grow your own cucumbers or go to a farmers’ market. Seed catalogs are a good source of information about suitable varieties. For cucumbers, kirby cucumbers are the classic for pickles, not English cucumbers. Persian cucumbers are a great size for packing into pint jars.

Select only the freshest vegetables for pickling that are free of bruises and blemishes. Use as soon as possible after picking. Pick cucumbers early in the day to help prevent a bitter flavor.

When choosing vegetables and fruit for pickling, select those that are nearly the same size, and cut or slice to the same size so that the pickling brine penetrates the pickles uniformly. We recommend about 1-½ inches for gherkins and 4 inches for dills. Use odd-shaped and more mature cucumbers for relishes and bread-and-butter style pickles.

HOW TO CLEAN PRODUCE

Vegetables and fruit to be pickled should be scrubbed thoroughly with a vegetable brush under running water. Soil or any soft spots left on the vegetables may contain bacteria, which can cause the pickles to spoil.

Cucumbers for pickling whole may have about a half-inch of the stem left on which should be discarded. Also, discard 1/16-inch slice from the blossom end of fresh cucumbers. The blossom end contains an enzyme that will cause excessive softening of pickles as they brine.

Optional: For crisper pickles, put the vegetables (whole or sliced) into a wide non-metallic bowl and spread a layer of pickling salt on top. Cover and let sit overnight in the **refrigerator**. Discard the liquid that will have emerged from the vegetables, then rinse well with cool water and dry the vegetables before pickling or canning as usual. The pickling salt helps to pull the moisture out of the vegetables and makes them crisper, and allows them to stay crisp longer.

Measure or weigh carefully, because the proportion of fresh vegetables to brine (salt to water) and other ingredients will affect flavor and, many times, safety.

WHICH SALT TO USE

Salt for pickling brines should be pickling salt (aka canning salt)—a pure, granulated or rock salt that has no iodine added. The iodine in table salt will darken pickles. Plain, non-iodized table salt may be used, but it contains anti-caking agents, which will make the brine cloudy.

WHICH VINEGAR TO USE

Vinegar must **have an acidity of 5 percent** for pickling. The strength of vinegar is usually shown on the label. Cider vinegar will give a fuller, more richly flavored pickle but will also add some color to the pickle.

If a lighter color product is desired, as with pickled pears or onions, white distilled vinegar should be used. Cider vinegar imparts a mellower taste and white vinegar a sharper taste, but both serve equally well for pickling.

Using the exact amount of vinegar called for in your recipe is critical for the quality and flavor of the pickles. If the brine or pickling syrup tastes too sharp, do not decrease the amount of the vinegar but instead add more sweetener until the taste is just right.

SUPPLIES

For Quick Refrigerator Pickles, no special gear is needed. You'll need a large non-metallic bowl and refrigerate in the bowl (covered) or in 2-pint jars that have been washed with hot soapy water, rinsed, and air dried.

For Water-Bath Canning, you'll need to buy jars that are specifically designed for home canning, such as mason or Ball jars. Most canning jars are sold with two-piece lids—a round metal screw

band and a removable flat metal lid that has a rubber-type sealing compound around the outer edge. Canning jars may be re-used as long as they're not chipped, nickled, or rusty. The screw band can be reused if it is cleaned well and does not rust. However, new jar lids must be used each year to ensure a tight seal. Never reuse lids. To prepare the jars, put them in a large pot of water and bring water to a simmer (180° F). Allow jars to remain in the hot water until ready to fill.

When making pickles it's best to use non-metallic utensils because metals will react with acids or salts used and cause undesirable color and taste changes in the pickles, making them unfit to eat.

WHAT IS HEADSPACE?

Headspace is the amount of air space between the top of the food or liquid put into a jar and the inside of the jar lid. The correct headspace is listed on your recipe and must be followed per recipe in order for a strong seal on the lids to form during processing. In general, allow ½-inch of headspace for pickles.

“MASTER” PICKLING RECIPE FOR QUICK PICKLES OR WATER BATH CANNING

Here is a “master” recipe for either quick pickling or boiling water bath canning, making a small batch of pickles to fill two pint-sized jars. The preparation method is similar for both; it just depends on if you're going to process the jars or refrigerate them for quick pickles.

Ingredients for 2 Pints

- 1-½ pounds cucumbers or other veggies
- 1-cup vinegar. Use white distilled or apple cider vinegar with 5 percent acidity. Use white vinegar when a light color is desirable, as with fruits and cauliflower. Think twice before using red wine vinegar, as it will turn all your vegetables pink!
- 1-½ tablespoons salt. Use kosher salt or pickling salt (aka canning salt). Kosher salt and pickling salt have no additives. Do not use iodized salt because it makes the brine cloudy and may change the color and texture of the vegetables, as well as possibly leave sediment at the bottom of the jars.
- 1 cup water. Note: Do not use hard water because the iron content will make the pickling solution cloudy and the pickles discolor.
- ¼ cup sugar – optional but most recipes include.
- Optional: 2 teaspoons dill seed or celery seed or spice of your choice such as turmeric. The classic is dill seeds. Mustard seed or peppercorns could also be used. For herbs, try dill, mint, basil, or anything that's overtaking your garden. Always use fresh herbs and spices in canning or pickling, as herbs and spices lose their flavor quickly.

- Optional: A few garlic cloves, peeled, sliced or smashed, enhances flavor.

Directions:

1. Cut your vegetables into even sizes, whether you're doing spears or coins, and put them into the two jars, or a large bowl for quick-pickling. Pack the veggies into the canning jars tightly without smashing them and leave room at the top for the brine and headspace (½ inch for pickles).
2. Make your pickling brine by combining the vinegar, water, and salt in a stainless-steel saucepan over high heat. Bring to a rolling boil, then pour the hot pickling brine over the veggies covering them, nearly filling each jar but leaving ½ inch of headspace.
3. For the quick pickles, pour the brine into the two jars of pickles and let them rest on the counter until cooled to room temperature, and no more than 1 hour. Then put a lid or plastic wrap on the bowl and place in the fridge. Wait anywhere from three days to a week for the flavor to develop, and the veggies will taste truly pickled. Keep in mind that the longer it brines, the better it tastes! You can also reuse the brine for your next batch.

The quick-pickling process stops here. To make pickles for longer-term storage, continue with boiling water bath method below.

4. If you're going to process and preserve your pickles for longer storage, tap the two jars gently to remove any air bubbles and top off with brine, if the veggies settle, leaving ½ inch of headspace. Use a clean plastic wand or plastic spatula and run gently around the jar between the food and side of each jar to release any additional trapped air. After filling always wipe the rim of the jar clean just before putting the lid on, to ensure a good seal. Add the new lids, which have been washed and dried to remove any possible debris, and screw bands.
5. Using the jar lifter, place the jars into a simmering pot of water or water-bath canner with a rack in the bottom. Make sure that the simmering water covers the jars by 1 to 2 inches and during processing. Cover and when the water comes back to a boil, set the timer for 10 minutes. When done processing, turn off heat; wait 10 minutes to remove the lid.
6. Remove jars using the jar lifter and place each on a towel or rack to cool. You may hear the jar lids "ping," which means the jars are properly sealed.
7. Leave jars undisturbed for 12 to 24 hours to cool. Do NOT retighten bands, as this may interfere with the sealing process.

8. After jars are completely cool, check the seals. Unscrew bands and press down gently on the center of the lid. If you don't feel any give, the jar is properly sealed. If the lid springs back up, it didn't seal. Put the jar in the fridge and eat within 2 weeks.
9. Label and date your jars and store them in a clean, cool, dark, and dry place such as a pantry, cabinet, or basement. Don't store in a warm spot!
10. To allow pickles to mellow and develop a delicious flavor, wait at least 3 weeks before eating! Keep in mind that pickles may be ready to enjoy earlier. It's all up to you and your tastes! Just don't let them go too long or the veggies' texture can deteriorate and turn rubbery. Refrigerate after opening.

Store jars in a cool, dry, dark place for up to 1 year as recommended by National Center for Home Food Preservation.