

Pickles, Relishes and Sauerkraut
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What is a pickle? The answer to the question, according to the Master Food Preserver handout, is that a "... pickle is any fruit, vegetable or meat preserved in vinegar or brine. Brine pickles are products fermented in salt brine. Relishes are prepared using chopped products and cooked in a spicy vinegar solution. Fruit pickles are fruits that are pickled in spicy, sweet-sour syrup." Learn how to pickle and ferment various foods at the free public education class offered by the Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County on July 30 and again on August 2, from 10:00 a.m. to noon at the county extension building in Placerville.

For more than four thousand years, people have been practicing the art of pickling, and it sometimes seems as though modern home food preservationists have been holding on to special family recipes for just about as long. Are these recipes safe to use? Preserving with tested recipes from approved sources assures the best success, but if Grandma's recipe must be used, these guidelines from the Pacific Northwest Extension may keep the famous pickles safe for human consumption. "Make sure that the recipe calls for vinegar that is at least 5% acidity. Quick-pickle recipes must have at least as much vinegar as water to be safe. If lime is included, the recipes must have a rinsing step. Brined pickles or sauerkraut recipes must include salt. Processing instructions must be correct. Quick-pickles can be processed as soon as they are made. Fermented pickles must not be processed until they have a sour taste." Remember that recipes written after 1988 by land-grant universities, US government agencies and canning supply manufacturers have been tested to the most up to date standards and can always be relied upon.

This simple recipe yields 4-5 pints of pickles and uses the boiling water bath canning process.

Reduced-Sodium Sliced Sweet Pickles

4 lbs (3- to 4-inch) pickling cucumbers

Brining solution:

1 qt distilled white vinegar (5 percent)

1 tbsp canning or pickling salt

1 tbsp mustard seed

1/2 cup sugar

Canning syrup:

1-2/3 cups distilled white vinegar (5 percent)

3 cups sugar

1 tbsp whole allspice

2-1/4 tsp celery seed

Procedure: Wash cucumbers and cut 1/16 inch off blossom end and discard. Cut cucumbers into 1/4-inch slices. Combine all ingredients for canning syrup in a saucepan and bring to boiling. Keep syrup hot until used. In a large kettle, mix the ingredients for the brining solution. Add the cut cucumbers, cover, and simmer until the cucumbers change color from bright to dull green (about 5 to 7 minutes). Drain the cucumber slices. Fill jars, and cover with hot canning syrup leaving 1/2-inch headspace.

Adjust lids and process 10 minutes for pints.

Source: National Center for Home Food Preservation

Questions about safe home food preservation? Call the Master Food Preservers and leave a message at (530) 621-5506. A Master Food Preserver will return your call. The Master Food Preservers are also available free of charge to speak to organizations and clubs about food safety or food preservation topics. Just call the number above to arrange for a speaker for small or large groups. For more information, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Food_Preservers/.