



New to pickling? Do your homework

Our garden is producing an overabundance of cucumbers this year. I thought I might try pickling some of them, but I'm not sure where to start. Any ideas?

First, if the cucumbers you're growing aren't a suitable variety for pickling, you might be disappointed in the results. Pickling cucumbers are usually smaller than cucumbers grown for slicing, and they tend to have thicker, bumpier skins. According to the cooking encyclopedia *The Cook's Thesaurus*, the best varieties for pickling include gherkin, cornichon, Kirby and lemon cucumber.

But if you want to try, your first decision will be whether you want to make fermented pickles, which are pickled from lactic acid in a fermentation process over three to four weeks in a crock or other suitable container, or quick-process pickles, which are pickled from acetic acid from vinegar in a process that takes just a few days.

If you have a burpless variety growing in your garden, go for the quick process, because burpless varieties produce an enzyme at maturity that causes pickles to soften during fermentation. Always choose smaller cucumbers — they make crisper pickles.

You can find detailed guidance for pickling cucumbers (and other vegetables) in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Complete Guide to

Home Canning, available online from the University of Georgia's National Center for Home Food Preservation at http://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/publications_usda.html. In addition, Ohio State University Extension offers two fact sheets, "Making Fermented Dill Pickles" and "Quick Process Pickles," at <http://ohioline.osu.edu/lines/food.html>.

Among the tips you'll want to follow:

- Pay strict attention to all guidelines, and process in a water bath canner according to recipe directions. Otherwise, your pickles may spoil or, worse, cause food poisoning.
- Always trim about a quarter-inch from the blossom end of the cucumber to prevent pickles from softening.
- Use only non-iodized salt made for pickling or canning. Regular table salt has anti-caking agents that can make the brine cloudy. Flake salt varies in density, so you can't be certain you're using the proper amount. If you want to make low-sodium pickles, use a tested recipe. Don't try to make fermented pickles with less salt than in the recipe; the amount is necessary to inhibit the growth of undesirable bacteria.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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