



Common Questions

Does the Presto device test only certain brands of pressure canner lids?

The Presto canner tester is designed to test various brands, including:

- **National**, made by the National Pressure Cooker Company, Eau Claire, Wisconsin
- **Magic Seal**, sold at Montgomery Ward
- **Maid of Honor**, sold at Sears Roebuck and Company
- **Presto® Pressure Canners**

For assistance, contact your local Extension office. They can provide guidance or information on where to send the dial gauge for testing. Note that pressure canners with weights, rather than a dial gauge, do not need testing.

Is it safe to reuse old canning jars?

Yes, canning jars from reputable sources such as Ball or Kerr are made to be used for many years. Make sure to check for nicks and cracks before using. Do not reuse lids.

What kind of glass jars should be avoided?

Jars that previously held commercially produced foods, such as mayonnaise or peanut butter, were designed to go through processing one time only and should not be used again for home processing.

Are Weck jars safe to use?

There are no USDA-approved procedures for using these jars; no studies have been funded or performed by the USDA or Cooperative Extension.

Do canning jars contain lead?

Illinois Extension sources indicate that amounts of lead in modern canning jars are insignificant. Older, colored glass jars may contain lead and are best used for display.

Are certain brands of lids sturdier than others?

Use name brands like Ball or Kerr rather than store brands for consistent quality.

Is it necessary to test dial gauges on a pressure canner?

Test dial-gauge pressure canners annually to ensure accuracy. Many local Illinois Extension offices provide free pressure canner testing. Find the nearest testing location: go.illinois.edu/PressureCannerTesting.

What is the difference between pickling with regular cucumbers and pickling cucumbers?

Cucumber varieties specific for pickling have smaller seeds and less bitter skins, which can result in a more appealing finished product.

What sources are available to purchase large amounts of pickling cucumbers?

Ask a local farmer market producer about purchasing a large amount and arrange to pick them up in the morning when they are harvested.

What type of canning process can be used for lacto-fermentation?

Fermented pickles use lacto-fermentation, just like sauerkraut and other fermented foods. This process reduces bad bacteria and encourages the benefits.

How long can pickling salt be stored?

Store pickling salt for up to five years.

What type of salt is best for making pickles?

Recommended or safe to use:

- Canning or pickling salt is recommended.
- Fermented and non-fermented pickles may be safely made using either iodized or non-iodized table salt as well; however, non-caking materials added to table salts may make the brine cloudy.
- Kosher salt may be used, but must not include anti-caking agents in the ingredient list. If it is in flake form, convert measurements to use 50% more flaked salt than called for in granulated form.

Not recommended:

- Sea salt is not recommended for pickling. The “extra” minerals it contains can negatively affect the color and flavor of the pickles. Flake salt varies in density and is not recommended for use.

Is it safe to reduce or double a recipe?

Picking recipes involves scientific formulas with exact ratios of acid, salt, sugar, and water required to keep preserved food safe. Do not alter recipes unless all ingredients can be divided evenly in half or doubled exactly, with no rounding or fractional amounts.

Look for various batch-size recipes from the USDA, NCHFP, Extension, or commercial canning supply companies.

Are there home food preservation recipes that should no longer be used?

The advent of modern food safety measures calls for preservation methods, processing times, and recipes that have advanced with the times. Find and use tested recipes, processes, and times published from sources after 1985.

What sources offer scientifically tested recipes?

Whether pickling beets or making bread and butter pickles, sweet and sour pickles, dill pickles, or cinnamon Christmas pickles that use red hot candies, it may take a few tries to find a preferred recipe.

It is important to use a recipe from an approved source:

Resources:

- [National Center for Home Food Preservation](http://nchfp.uga.edu), nchfp.uga.edu
- [Complete Guide to Home Canning](#), USDA
- [So Easy to Preserve](#), University of Georgia Extension
- Commercial Canning Supply Companies

Commonly requested tested recipes:

- [Pickled Mixed Vegetables](#), National Center for Home Food Preservation
- [Pickled Peppers](#), Colorado State University Extension

Do carrots require any preparation before pickling?

The National Center for Home Food Preservation recommends cooking carrots until they are half-cooked or just tender before processing. Always use a recipe from an approved source.



What recipes produce crispy pickled peppers, such as banana pepper or jalapeño?

For a crispy finished product, use a recipe from an approved source like NCHFP, USDA, or Extension that uses pickling lime. Make sure to follow the directions for soaking and rinsing.

What additive can help make pickles crisp?

Alum does not improve the firmness of quick-process pickles but may be safely used to firm fermented pickles, although it is unnecessary.

The **calcium in lime** improves quick pickle firmness. Food-grade lime may be used as a lime-water solution for soaking fresh cucumbers for 12 to 24 hours before pickling them. Excess lime absorbed by the cucumbers must be removed to make safe pickles. To remove excess lime, drain the lime-water solution, rinse, and then resoak the cucumbers in fresh water for 1 hour. Repeat the rinsing and soaking steps two more times.

To further improve pickle firmness, **process cucumber pickles for 30 minutes in water at 180 F**. This process also prevents spoilage, but the water temperature should not fall below 180 F. Use a candy or jelly thermometer to check the water temperature.

Source: [So Easy to Preserve](#), University of Georgia Extension.

What holds pickling spices and prevents clouding?

Tea bags make an excellent holder for pickling spices.

Is there a way to prevent radish skins from bleeding when making quick pickles so the product is not pink?

Sprinkle radishes with salt, let stand for 30 minutes, then drain and pat dry before pouring pickling solution over. Leave a small amount of “top” on the radish and process the whole. If that doesn’t work, then enjoy “pink pickles.”

Why are grape leaves used in some pickle recipes?

Grape leaves contain tannins, inhibiting the pectinase enzyme, making pickles soft. However, removing the cucumbers’ blossom ends, which are the source of undesirable enzymes, makes adding grape leaves unnecessary. Most modern recipes do not use grape leaves, which can sometimes impart a bitter flavor.

Why is canning at 240 F recommended when 210 F kills all pathogens?

Botulinum spores are very hard to destroy at boiling water temperatures; the higher the canner temperature, the more easily they are destroyed.

Therefore, all low-acid foods should be sterilized at temperatures of 240 to 250 F, which is attainable with pressure canners operating at 10 to 15 PSIG.

Are fermentation locks necessary? Is there a particular type that is best for use with mason jars?

All fermentation locks let carbon dioxide escape and keep oxygen out. Extension recommends an airlock to ensure an anaerobic environment, but fermenting is possible without one. Just make sure the vegetables are submerged under the brine level in all cases.

Are fermented pickles shelf-stable?

Fully fermented pickles may be stored in their original container for about 4 to 6 months, provided they are refrigerated, and surface scum and molds are removed regularly. Canning fully fermented pickles is a better way to store them.

- To can, pour brine into a pan, heat slowly to a boil, and simmer for 5 minutes. Filter brine through paper coffee filters to reduce cloudiness.
- Fill hot jars with pickles and hot brine, leaving ½-inch of headspace.
- Remove air bubbles, adjust headspace if needed, and wipe rims of jars with a dampened, clean paper towel.
- Adjust lids and process as below or use the low-temperature pasteurization treatment.

The following treatment results in a better product texture but must be carefully managed to avoid possible spoilage. Caution: Use this treatment only if indicated in the recipe.

- Place jars in a canner filled halfway with warm water, 120 to 140 F.
- Add hot water to a level 1 inch above the jars.
- Heat water and maintain a temperature of 180 to 185 F for 30 minutes; use a candy or jelly thermometer to be certain that the water temperature is at least 180 F during the entire 30 minutes.
- Temperatures higher than 185 F may cause unnecessary softening of pickles.

Source: [USDA](#).

Is there a benefit to soaking pickling cucumbers in an ice bath before making refrigerator pickles?

The ice bath firms up the cell wall of the cucumbers; it might help crisp the refrigerator pickles, although it is unnecessary. Keeping pickles in the refrigerator will also result in crisp pickles.

Does a brine solution help store cucumbers longer until enough are harvested to make a batch of pickles?

Some commercial pickling companies may store cucumbers in brine, but the success of their formulas on small-scale recipes at home is unknown.

Store freshly harvested cucumbers in the refrigerator. When enough cucumbers are available to make a batch, soak them in brine overnight to plump them, or make several small batches as cucumbers are harvested. Ball, Kehr, and Mrs. Wages have some smaller-yielding recipes.

Is it necessary to soak freshly picked cucumbers overnight before pickling them?

Soaking overnight is a method used when cucumbers are not fresh. Harvesting cucumbers early in the morning and pickling them the same day will ensure a better product. Many recipes for quick pickles call for soaking in ice water for a few hours before processing.

Can brine from commercially bought pickles be used to process additional quick pickles?

Commercially bought pickle brine can be reused to flavor pickled vegetables, but it should not be used for preservation. The acid-to-water ratio is not the same as a fresh brine, but it will impart flavor to whatever vegetables you add to the jar. Let stand for 2 to 3 days in the refrigerator before using and use within 7 to 10 days. Discard if you observe signs of spoilage, such as bubbles, odor, or color changes.

Can leftover or previously used brine be reused?

Leftover or reused brine is not safe for preserving or canning as pickles, but can be used to make “refrigerator vegetables” as a fresh condiment. Pour leftover or reused brine over any vegetable and refrigerate. Let the flavors develop for a few days and enjoy.

Can the number of days be reduced for making 14-day pickles if the recipe is reduced proportionally?

No, follow an approved recipe exactly. Though recipe ingredients may be divided in half or doubled exactly, with no rounding or fractional amounts, processing times and temperatures should never be altered from what the recipe dictates.

Do most people use a canning bath or a pressure canner for dill pickles?

Pickles are acidified and best processed in a boiling-water bath. Pressure canning pickles can result in a soft, rather than crisp, texture.

Are glass containers suitable for quick pickling?

Glass can be used, but it is more fragile and can break.

How long can quick pickles be stored after canning?

According to the recipe, foods made from an approved recipe are best used within one year when processed in a boiling-water bath and stored in a cool, dry space. However, if the seal is not broken or the lid rusted or otherwise compromised, food will be safe for several years, although quality, texture, and taste may be affected.

What type of pickles do not require processing?

Refrigerator pickles are not processed, and recipes are widely available. Make sure the recipe calls for vinegar with 5% acidity.

Must refrigerator pickles be stored in a refrigerator immediately after cooling?

Always refrigerate pickles that are not processed in a boiling water bath. Leaving them on the counter can lead to spoilage, as room temperature is ideal for spoilage bacteria to grow.

Fermented pickles are left out during fermentation, which is unsafe for refrigerated pickles.

How long do refrigerator pickles and pickled green tomatoes last in the refrigerator after opening?

If exposure to room temperature is limited, pickled green tomatoes should last 1 to 2 months after opening. When serving, put a small amount in a bowl and return the jar to the refrigerator. Discard if signs of spoilage can be seen, such as bubbles, changes in color, or odors.

Does a home kitchen operation need to be certified to sell apple butter, jellies, and pickles at farmers' markets?

No, a home kitchen used to prepare cottage foods for sale does not have to be certified. The cottage food producer must register with the local health department and follow the requirements listed in the Cottage Food Law. Visit the Illinois Extension Cottage Food website to learn which types of foods are allowed, where to apply, and how to follow all requirements listed in the law.

How can one test for hard or soft water?

Purchase an in-home test kit at a local hardware store or find DIY instructions on YouTube.

What are some uses for soft, mushy pickles?

Use soft pickles to impart a flavor to condiments, such as tartar sauce or sandwich spread, or add them to potato, egg, or chicken salads.



Call Your Local Office

Contact your local Illinois Extension office with your food safety questions: go.illinois.edu/FindILExtension.

References and Resources

- [So Easy to Preserve](#), University of Georgia Extension
- [Complete Guide to Home Canning](#), National Center for Home Food Preservation
- [The Ball Blue Book](#)
- [What's Cooking with Mary Liz Wright](#), YouTube.com
- [Cottage Food](#), University of Illinois Extension
- [Food Preservation](#), University of Illinois Extension

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