



EAT

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5 tips for perfect pickling

Whether it's the briny snap of a dill spear at a summer cookout or a tangy dollop of chowchow atop a ballpark frank, few things add complexity, acidity and even a dash of nostalgia quite like pickles. While pickled veggies abound in France, Eastern Europe and Scandinavia, the tradition has a special place in Southern kitchens, where the art of “puttin’ up” preserves the flavor and freshness of harvest crops long after the season ends.

Pickling, much like jamming and canning, is a heritage culinary skill that has [experienced a resurgence](#) in recent years. But Lyn Deardorff, the master canner and Atlanta-based food educator behind [Preserving Now](#), has been a pickle connoisseur since long before it became fashionable again.

While Deardorff has spent the last few years showing people that the technique is more approachable than they might think, her love affair began when she first tried her mother-in-law's beloved bread and butter pickles. Decades later, that affinity has culminated in [The Learning Kitchen](#), a classroom space inside the Sweet Auburn Curb Market that she launched in January. With lessons on canning, fermenting and more, the venture is Deardorff's way of sharing her knowledge with others and helping to preserve lost arts of the kitchen.

For those who can't make it to a class in person, below she shares a few nuggets of wisdom for aspiring pickle pros.



It starts with the right equipment. The proper tools are essential to pickling, but it doesn't take much. In fact, you may already have what you need on hand. To start, just find “any kind of pot large enough to hold your jars with one inch of boiling water over the top,” said Deardorff. “So if you're making a small batch, you don't need a big canning pot — you could make it out of your saucepan.” The only other must-haves are Mason jars with traditional two-piece lids. “That's the easiest and most successful way to can,” said Deardorff. Boiling the jars not only sterilizes them, she says, it also creates a vacuum seal that allows you to safely store the final product in a cupboard instead of the fridge.

Safety first: Find credible recipes, and don't ad-lib. Thanks to the internet, there are scads of recipes available, but Deardorff recommends being picky with your pickling source material. Find credible recipes and follow them with precision. For the “best scientific knowledge,” she recommends the University of Georgia's [National Center for Home Food Preservation](#). This invaluable resource offers well-vetted recipes and safety tips, plus information on shelf life, recommended acidity levels, minimum water temperatures and more. “This is a place where the food scientists did all the testing for the home canning that the USDA goes by,” she said.

It's all about acidity. When it comes to pickling, acid is “the critical element,” according to Deardorff. The needed acid quantity will vary from recipe to recipe based on what you're pickling, and getting the amount correct is not just essential to

flavor. “If you don't get enough vinegar, the biggest danger is not just growing bacteria or mold — but growing botulism,” said Deardorff. She adds that even vegetables are susceptible to botulism thanks to their low acidity. This is why everyone, and especially beginners, must use a credible recipe. “You need to follow a canning recipe in order to know how long to process the jars and how much vinegar is to be added,” she said.



Think outside the cuke. While the humble dill spear is a time-tested favorite, don't be afraid to experiment with other produce. “You can pickle just about any vegetable,” said Deardorff, citing garlic, carrots and okra as prime examples. Pickled cherry tomatoes are a Deardorff favorite because they pair perfectly with goat cheese for antipasti with a summery Southern twist. You can also upgrade your condiment game with chutney or chowchow, a beloved Southern relish that adds a tangy sweetness to hot dogs, burgers, pulled pork, black-eyed peas and anything else that could benefit from a burst of sweet, tangy acidity. (This being the South, we're obligated to note that [fried pickles](#) are a delicacy.)

Don't toss the brine. Once your vegetable of choice has been sufficiently pickled, put the liquid left behind in the jar to work. Deardorff says she loves to use leftover pickle brine in a simple salad dressing: The tangy, spiced brine adds more complexity to the vinaigrette than your standard apple cider or white wine vinegar.

This works especially well with the juice from her beloved cherry tomato recipe, which you can make yourself by following the instructions below.

Pickled Cherry Tomatoes

Makes about 2 pints (recipe may be doubled)

Recipes courtesy of Lyn Deardorff and [Preserving Now](#)

Ingredients

- 3 cups small tomatoes such as sungold, black cherry or an assortment (ripe but firm)
- 2 cloves peeled garlic
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 tablespoons fresh dill, chopped
- 1 tablespoons tarragon (or 2 sprigs fresh tarragon)
- 1 tablespoon yellow mustard seeds
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon fresh lime juice (or lemon juice)
- 1 cup white vinegar (or apple cider vinegar)
- 2 tablespoons organic raw sugar (or cane sugar)
- 1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes (optional, increase to 1 teaspoon for more heat)

Instructions

Wash jars and place them (without lids) in a water-bath canner. Bring to a boil and reduce heat to a simmer until ready to use.

Puncture the bottom of each tomato with a sharp instrument such as a skewer or fork tine. This helps the pickling liquid flavor the whole tomato more completely. Set aside.

In a non-reactive pot, bring vinegar, tarragon, mustard seeds, lime (or lemon) juice, sugar, salt and red pepper flakes (if desired) to a boil. Remove from heat.

Move jars to a clean cloth atop a countertop or table. Place one clove of garlic in each jar and divide dill into each jar equally. Pack tomatoes into each jar tightly while being careful not to crush them. Tuck a bay leaf into each jar. Carefully ladle hot

pickling liquid into each jar, leaving ½-inch of headspace (the space between the liquid and the top of the jar). Using a bubbler or table knife, loosen air bubbles and refill to allowable headspace.

Wipe down the rim of each jar, fit each lid and band. Return to water bath for 10 minutes after water returns to a boil. Remove and let cool for 12 hours. Test lids after 1 hour and refrigerate any jars that have not fully sealed. Label and date. Store in a cool, dark place.

Note: Small batches such as this can be refrigerated without water bath processing and will last up several months.

Tomato Vinaigrette

Makes about 1/2 quart

Ingredients

- 1 jar of pickled tomatoes
- 1/2 cup of olive oil
- 1 tablespoon capers (optional)

Instructions

In a 1-quart Mason Jar, puree 1 jar of pickled tomatoes with an immersion blender. (If you prefer, you can puree in a blender or food processor.). Reduce liquid by 1/3 by heating in saucepan over medium heat. Return liquid to the Mason jar and then blend in a 1/2 cup of olive oil until emulsified. Add 1 tablespoon capers if desired. Use in salads, over greens and other vegetables.