

Jack's 14-day Sweet Pickles

By Brian Noyes, proprietor and owner of Hayfields Little Washington

Here's my favorite sweet pickle recipe, taught to me by my father-in-law. I've tweaked it and simplified it over the years and, although this is a time-consuming project spread over two weeks, it's worth the effort. Before I was a baker and a market owner, I was the art director at The Washington Post. One of the most memorable days there was the publication of the Post's Food section story on canning, and the bullhorn laugh that echoed through the newsroom after editor Ben Bradlee saw the story's headline in print: *You Can Put Pickles Up Yourself*.

Yield: About 16 one-pint canning jars

Most processing supplies, including canning equipment and jars, ceramic crocks, pickling salt, pickling spices, and Pickle Crisp calcium chloride are available at the CFC Farm and Home Center (the Rappahannock co-op), at larger grocery stores or via Amazon. Kirby cucumbers are found at farmer's markets (avoid using waxed cucumbers from grocery stores).

Ingredients:

10-12 pounds Kirby cucumbers (four to five inches), trimming off both ends and sliced, then rinsed

6 cups pickling salt (no substitutions)

5.5 ounce jar Pickle Crisp granules (calcium chloride), divided

1.5 ounce jar pickling spices

4 teaspoons celery seed

16 cups (4 quarts) white vinegar at 5% acidity, divided

25 cups (5 five-pound bags) granulated sugar

1. Day 1: Place the sliced and rinsed cucumbers in a 2-gallon ceramic crock. In a large stockpot, combine 16 cups water and 2 cups pickling salt, and bring to a boil. Carefully pour the hot liquid over the cucumbers and cover (I place the crock on a large tray, position a salad plate on top of

the cucumbers, place a dinner plate on top, and wrap with plastic wrap). It may overflow the first day (hence the tray underneath). Leave at room temperature for 48 hours.

2. Day 3. Remove cucumber slices with slotted spoon and place in one or two large bowls. Discard the liquid. Drain and rinse the cucumbers, and return them to the rinsed-out crock. In a large stockpot, again combine 16 cups water and 2 cups pickling salt, and bring to a boil. Carefully pour the hot liquid over the cucumbers and cover. Leave at room temperature for 48 hours.

3. Day 5. Remove cucumber slices with slotted spoon and place in one or two large bowls. Discard the liquid. Drain and rinse the cucumbers, and return them to the rinsed-out crock. In a large stockpot, again combine 16 cups water and 2 cups pickling salt, and bring to a boil. Carefully pour the hot liquid over the cucumbers and cover. Leave at room temperature for 24 hours.

4. Day 6. Remove cucumbers with slotted spoon. Discard the liquid. Drain and rinse the cucumbers, and return them to the rinsed-out crock. In a large stockpot, add 16 cups water and bring to a boil. Carefully add 2 tablespoons of Pickle Crisp granules (calcium chloride); mixture will quickly foam up and subside, then stir. Carefully pour the hot liquid over the cucumbers and cover. Leave at room temperature for 24 hours.

5. Day 7. Remove cucumbers with slotted spoon. Drain and discard the liquid, and rinse cucumber slices. In a large sheet of cheesecloth, add 1.5 ounce jar pickling spices (I prefer to remove the cloves to keep the spice flavor subtle) and 4 teaspoons celery seed. Wrap up the cheesecloth and double-tie with twine or string, and set aside. In a large stockpot, combine 8 cups white vinegar and 16 cups granulated sugar, add the bag of spices, and bring to a boil. Carefully pour the hot brine over the cucumbers and cover for 24 hours.

6. Day 8. Remove cucumbers with slotted spoon, saving the syrup in the crock, and place the cucumbers in a strainer atop a large bowl (you may need two) to catch the syrup. Set aside the bag of spices (you'll use it again over the remaining days). Return the drained cucumbers to the rinsed-out crock. Return the reserved syrup to the large stockpot, adding any syrup remaining in the bowl(s). Add 1 ½ cups of granulated sugar to the stockpot, and add the bag of spices. Bring to a boil. Carefully pour the hot syrup over the cucumbers and cover for 24 hours.

7. Day 9. Remove cucumbers with slotted spoon, saving the syrup in the crock, and place the cucumbers in a strainer atop a large bowl (you may need two) to catch the syrup. Set aside the bag of spices (you'll use it again over the remaining days). Return the drained cucumbers to the rinsed-out crock. Return the reserved syrup to the large stockpot, adding any syrup remaining in the bowl(s). Add 1 ½ cups of granulated sugar to the stockpot, and add the bag of spices. Bring to a boil. Carefully pour the hot syrup over the cucumbers and cover for 24 hours.

8. Day 10. Remove cucumbers with slotted spoon, saving the syrup in the crock, and place the cucumbers in a strainer atop a large bowl (you may need two) to catch the syrup. Set aside the

bag of spices (you'll use it again over the remaining days). Return the drained cucumbers to the rinsed-out crock. Return the reserved syrup to the large stockpot, adding any syrup remaining in the bowl(s). Add 1 ½ cups of granulated sugar to the stockpot, and add the bag of spices. Bring to a boil. Carefully pour the hot syrup over the cucumbers and cover for 24 hours.

9. Day 11. Remove cucumbers with slotted spoon, saving the syrup in the crock, and place the cucumbers in a strainer atop a large bowl (you may need two) to catch the syrup. Set aside the bag of spices (you'll use it again over the remaining days). Return the drained cucumbers to the rinsed-out crock. Return the reserved syrup to the large stockpot, adding any syrup remaining in the bowl(s). Add 1 ½ cups of granulated sugar to the stockpot, and add the bag of spices. Bring to a boil. Carefully pour the hot syrup over the cucumbers and cover for 24 hours.

10. Day 12. Remove cucumbers with slotted spoon. Drain and discard the syrup (you'll be making a new batch). Rinse and drain the cucumber slices. Set aside the bag of spices (you'll use it again over the remaining days). Return the rinsed and drained cucumbers to the rinsed-out crock. In the large stockpot, combine 8 cups white vinegar and 16 cups granulated sugar, add the bag of spices, and bring to a boil. Carefully pour the hot brine over the cucumbers and cover for 24 hours.

11. Day 13. Remove cucumbers with slotted spoon, saving the syrup in the crock, and place the cucumbers in a strainer atop a large bowl (you may need two) to catch the syrup. Set aside the bag of spices (you'll use it again over the final day). Return the drained cucumbers to the rinsed-out crock. Return the reserved syrup to the large stockpot, adding any syrup remaining in the bowl(s). Add 1 ½ cups of granulated sugar to the stockpot, and add the bag of spices. Bring to a boil. Carefully pour the hot syrup over the cucumbers and cover for 24 hours.

12. Day 14. Remove cucumbers with slotted spoon, saving the syrup in the crock, and place the cucumbers in a strainer atop a large bowl (you may need two) to catch the syrup. Set aside the bag of spices (you'll use it one last time). Set aside the drained cucumbers in the rinsed-out crock. Return the reserved syrup to the large stockpot, adding any syrup remaining in the bowl(s). Add 1 ½ cups of granulated sugar to the stockpot, and add the bag of spices. Bring to a boil, then turn off the heat. Cover with the stockpot lid.

13. To can the pickles, sterilize the jars, rings, and lids according to the manufacturer's directions.

14. Set a raised wire rack on a dishtowel or layer of newspaper. Pack the jars with the pickles and cover with the sugary syrup mixture from the crock, filling the jars up to ½ inch from the top. Wipe the rims of the jars clean and seal tightly. In batches, transfer the jars to a canning pot and add water to cover by 1 to 2 inches. Boil the jars for 10 minutes, sealing them according to the manufacturer's directions. Repeat with the remaining filled jars.

15. Carefully remove the jars from the water and place on the wire rack over the towel or newspapers. Let stand for several hours until cooled.

16. Unopened jars of pickles will keep at room temperature for about 1 year; opened jars will keep in the fridge, tightly covered, for up to 3 months.

EACH DAY, on the eighth through eleventh days:

Daily: Drain and save the syrup. Save the spice bag.

Remove cucumbers with slotted spoon and place in large bowls.

Daily: Add 1.5 cups of new sugar to the saved syrup (including any in the bowls), and boil with the spice bag. Pour boiling syrup and the spice bag over the cukes.

On the twelfth day:

Remove cukes with slotted spoon. Drain and discard liquid and rinse cucumbers. Start again with new batch of vinegar and sugar, and use existing bag of spices.

Boil:

2 quarts (8 cups) white vinegar at 5% acidity

16 cups sugar

Add cheesecloth bag of spices and boil

On the thirteenth day:

Daily: Drain and save the syrup. Save the spice bag.

Remove cucumbers with slotted spoon and place in large bowls.

Daily: Add 1.5 cups of new sugar to the saved syrup (including any in the bowls), and boil with the spice bag. Pour boiling syrup and the spice bag over the cukes.

On the fourteenth day:

Remove cukes with slotted spoon. Drain syrup into saucepan. Add 1.5 cups new sugar and bring to a boil, including spice bag.

Add 1.5 cups of new sugar to the saved syrup (including any in the bowls), and boil with the spice bag. Process empty jars in boiling water, along with lids and rings. Add exactly 1/8 teaspoon of Calcium Chloride to each jar. Fill jars with cucumbers and syrup, leaving 1/2 headspace.

Daily checklist

- ___ Day 1 (Date: _____) Boiling water and salt
- ___ Day 3 (Date: _____) Boiling water and salt
- ___ Day 5 (Date: _____) Boiling water and salt
- ___ Day 6 (Date: _____) Boiling water and calcium chloride
- ___ Day 7 (Date: _____) Vinegar, sugar, spice bag
- ___ Day 8 (Date: _____) Vinegar, sugar, spice bag
- ___ Day 9 (Date: _____) Vinegar, sugar, spice bag
- ___ Day 10 (Date: _____) Vinegar, sugar, spice bag

- ___ Day 11 (Date: _____) Vinegar, sugar, spice bag
- ___ Day 12 (Date: _____) New batch of Vinegar, sugar, spice bag
- ___ Day 13 (Date: _____) Vinegar, sugar, spice bag
- ___ Day 14 (Date: _____) Vinegar, sugar, spice bag, canning.