



Using, Storing and Preserving



# Cucumber pickles

Michigan-grown cucumber pickles are available during July and August.

Prepared by:

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*Michigan Fresh: Using, Storing and Preserving Cucumber Pickles* was first published in March 2015 and revised in July 2023. The original was adapted from *Complete Guide to Home Canning*, (Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 539), USDA, revised 2009.

## Food Safety and Storage

- Wash hands before and after handling fresh produce.
- For the highest quality pickle, plan to pickle within 24 hours of picking.
- Use only fresh, blemish-free cucumbers.
- Wash cucumbers thoroughly under running water. Do not use soap.
- Select fresh, firm, unwaxed cucumbers. Quite often pickles purchased from a grocery store will have a wax finish. This will prevent the brine from penetrating and not properly curing to make a good pickle.
- Pick before seeds become hard. Less than 2 inches long for pickles, 4 to 6 inches for dills and 6 to 8 inches for slicing varieties.
- Avoid yellow and large cucumbers.
- Pick daily if growing your own.
- Use pure, granulated, non-iodized canning or pickling salt, high-grade vinegar of 5 percent acidity and fresh spices.
- Keep cucumbers away from raw meats and meat juices to prevent cross-contamination.
- Store processed pickles in a dark, cool, dry place.
- For best quality and nutritive value, preserve no more than your family can consume in 12 months.



## Yield

1 to 1 ½ pounds fresh	=	1 pint canned sweet gherkins (1 ½ inches or less)
1 ½ to 2 pounds fresh	=	1 quart canned dills (4-inch average)
1 bushel (48 pounds)	=	16 to 24 quarts (average 2 pounds per quart)
14 pounds fresh	=	a canner load of 7 quarts
9 pounds fresh	=	a canner load of 9 pints

## How to Preserve

**Preparation:** Thoroughly wash cucumbers, especially around the stem, where soil can be trapped. Bacteria trapped in soil are often a cause of pickles softening. Remove and discard a ¼-inch slice from the blossom end of fresh cucumbers — blossoms contain an enzyme that causes excessive softening of pickles. Sort cucumbers by

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food-grade plastic bag. Freezer bags sold for packaging turkeys are suitable for use with 5-gallon containers.

**Caution:** *Be certain that foods come in contact only with food-grade plastics.* Do not use garbage bags, trash can liners, or galvanized or plastic garbage cans. Cucumbers must be kept 1 to 2 inches below the brine surface while fermenting. After adding the cucumbers and brine, insert a suitably sized dinner plate or glass pie plate inside the fermentation container to press the vegetables into the brine. The plate must be slightly smaller than the container opening yet large enough to cover most of the cucumbers. To keep the plate and the cucumbers under the surface of the brine, fill two to three clean quart jars with water, put on the lids and set them on the plate. Cover the container opening with a clean, heavy bath towel to prevent contamination from insects and molds while the cucumbers are fermenting.

### Fresh-packed pickles

Fresh-packed or quick-process pickles are soaked in a salt solution for several hours or overnight, drained and combined with a boiling solution of vinegar and spices, then processed in a boiling water canner. The acetic acid of the vinegar produces the tart flavor.

### Processing

All pickled products are high-acid products. This acid may come from the large amount of vinegar added to them or from their being brined or fermented. Regardless of the process, the product must be processed in a boiling water bath canner. Times and procedures will vary. Follow a research-tested recipe.

Processing is necessary to destroy the yeasts, molds and bacteria that may cause the products to spoil, and to inactivate enzymes that could affect the color, flavor and texture of the pickled product. A vacuum seal is necessary on the jar to prevent other organisms from entering.

**Alternative processing for cucumber pickles:** low-temperature pasteurization treatment. **Caution:** *Do not use this treatment on reduced-sodium pickles.*

The following treatment results in a better product texture but must be carefully managed to avoid possible spoilage. Place jars in a canner half-filled with warm water (120 degrees to 140 degrees F). Then add hot water to raise the water level to 1 inch above the jars. Heat the water enough to maintain the water temperature at 180 degrees to 185 degrees F for 30 minutes. Check with a candy or jelly thermometer to be certain that the water temperature is at least 180 degrees F during the entire 30 minutes. Temperatures higher than 185 degrees may cause unnecessary softening of pickles. **Caution:** *Use only when recipe indicates that it is an option.*

## References

Andress, E., & Harrison, J. A. (2014). *So easy to preserve* (Bulletin 989). (6th ed.). University of Georgia Cooperative Extension.

U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2015). *Complete guide to home canning* (Rev. ed.). (Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 539). [http://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/publications\\_usda.html](http://nchfp.uga.edu/publications/publications_usda.html)

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