

Common Pickle Problems

Can I use flaked salt for pickling?

Most recipes call for granulated pickling or canning salt. Flake salt varies in density and is not recommended for pickling.

When making quick process pickles, can I store any leftover pickling solution for future use?

If the pickling solution is fresh and has not been used to make pickles, cover it and store it in the refrigerator for later use. If the pickling solution has been used, it can be stored in the refrigerator and reused in a day or two for barbecue sauce, cole slaw dressing or a marinade. If mold growth occurs, throw it out.

Why did the liquid in my dill pickles turn pink?

Using overmature dill may cause this. If so, the product is still safe. However, yeast growth could also cause this. If yeast growth is evident, discard the pickles.

I don't have the type of dill my recipe calls for. What can I substitute?

For each quart, try 3 heads of fresh dill or 1 to 2 tablespoons dill seed (dill weed = 2 tablespoons).

Can I use burpless cucumbers for pickling?

Burpless cucumbers are not recommended for use in fermented pickles. This is because at their normal mature size, they produce an enzyme that causes the pickles to soften during fermentation. However, if smaller burpless cucumbers (those with small seed) are used, they may be suitable for making fresh pack pickles.

I have an old recipe that calls for adding a grape leaf to each jar of pickles. Why?

Grape leaves contain a substance that inhibits enzymes that make pickles soft. However, if you remove the blossom end of the cucumbers (the

source of undesirable enzymes) you don't need to add grape leaves.

Why did the garlic cloves in my pickles turn green or bluish green?

This reaction may be due to iron, tin or aluminum in your cooking pot, water or water pipes reacting with the pigments in the garlic. Or, the garlic may naturally have more bluish pigment, and it is more evident after pickling. Immature bulbs should be cured two to four weeks at 70 ° F. The pickles are safe to eat.

Why are my pickles turning cloudy?

While fermenting pickles, the brine might become cloudy due to lactic acid bacteria growth during the fermentation period. If a noncloudy appearance is desired, a fresh brine can be used to pack the pickles when they are ready for processing.

In nonfermented pickles (fresh pack), cloudiness might indicate spoilage. Check the pickles for signs of off-odors and mushiness of the pickles. If these signs are absent, the pickles are safe to eat.

Sometimes the fillers (anticaking agents) in regular table salt may cause slight cloudiness, so always use pickling salt.

Hard water might also cause cloudiness. If soft water is not available, boil the hard water and let it sit undisturbed overnight. Pour off the top portion and use it in the pickling solution.

Can I ferment pickles in a new plastic garbage can?

The plastic needs to be food-grade. Pickles and sauerkraut can be fermented in large stoneware crocks, large glass jars or food-grade plastic containers. If you're not sure if a plastic container is

safe for food, read its label or contact its manufacturer. Another option is to line a questionable container with several thicknesses of food-grade plastic bags. Do not use aluminum, copper, brass, galvanized or iron containers for fermenting pickles or sauerkraut.

My favorite pickle recipe is from my grandmother and does not call for a boiling water bath process. Do I really need to process pickles?

Processing is necessary for all pickles and relishes to destroy the yeasts, molds and bacteria that may cause the product to spoil and also to inactivate enzymes that could affect color, flavor and texture of the pickled product. Process pickled products for the length of time specified in the recipe. If no time is given, process the product for at least 10 minutes.

Carefully place the filled jars onto a rack in the canner containing hot water. The water should be deep enough to cover the jars by at least 1 inch. Cover the canner and bring the water to a boil. Start counting processing time as soon as the water begins to boil.

My neighbor gave me some pickles he made by just pouring vinegar over fresh cucumbers. Are they safe?

Cucumbers, hot peppers, hard-cooked eggs and horseradish can be put in sterilized jars, covered with hot vinegar, and stored in the refrigerator. However, to make a safe product, the jar and lid must be sterilized, only pure 5 percent acidity vinegar used, and the product must be stored in the refrigerator. Herbs, like dill, can be added.

I have been making some wonderful flavored vinegars. Can these homemade vinegars be used to make pickles?

Save the homemade or flavored vinegars for things like salads. When making pickles, use only commercially produced 5 percent acidity cider or white vinegar. The acidity level of homemade vinegars is unknown and may make the pickles unsafe. The acid level is on the label of the vinegar.

I accidentally limed my pickles in an aluminum pan. Will they be safe to eat?

Aluminum is not recommended for use with lime because the lime can "pit" the container, increasing the aluminum content of the finished product. This is not a procedure that you would want to do each time you made pickles and then use the product. However, one batch of pickles should not cause health problems. If the container, however, is badly pitted, the best option would be to discard the product.

I would like to make sweet pickles, but I am diabetic. Can I use an artificial sweetener?

The best approach is to take dill pickle slices, rinse to remove the salty flavor and sprinkle with artificial sweetener. Allow these to sit in the refrigerator at least 30 minutes before use. Substituting artificial sweeteners for the sugar in sweet pickle recipes is not recommended.

For more information on making pickles request [HGIC 3100, Pickle Basics](#); [HGIC 3420, Pickled Cucumbers](#); [HGIC 3400, Pickled Foods](#); [HGIC 3440, Pickled Peppers](#); and [HGIC 3380, Dill Pickles & Sauerkraut](#). For more information on home canning contact your local Extension Service.

Remedies for Pickling Problems

Problem	Cause	Prevention
Soft or slippery pickles (if spoilage is evident, do not eat)	A brine is too weak	Maintain salt concentration specified in recipe.
	Vinegar is too weak.	Use vinegar of 5 percent acidity.
	Cucumbers stored at too high a temperature during curing/brining.	Store cucumbers between 70 and 75 °F. This is the optimum temperature for growth of the organisms necessary for fermentation.
	Insufficient amount of brine.	Keep cucumbers immersed in the brine.
	Pickles not processed properly (to destroy microorganisms).	Process in a boiling-water canner for the specified time indicated for the product. As in all canning, a seal is necessary on the jar to prevent other microorganisms from entering.
	Moldy garlic or spices.	Always use fresh spices.
	Blossom ends not removed.	Always remove blossom ends.

Remedies for Pickling Problems (continued)

Problem	Cause	Prevention
Strong, bitter taste	Spices cooked too long in vinegar, or too many spices used.	Follow directions for amount of spices to use and the boiling time.
	Vinegar too strong.	Use vinegar of the proper strength (5-percent acidity).
	Dry weather.	No prevention. Bitter taste is usually in the peeling.
	Using salt substitutes.	Potassium chloride ingredient in these is naturally bitter.
Hollow pickles	Cucumbers too large for brining.	Use smaller cucumbers for brining.
	Improper curing.	Keep brine proper strength and the product well-covered. Cure until fermentation is complete.
	Long lapse of time between gathering and brining.	Pickling process should be started within 24 hours after gathering.
	Faulty growth of cucumber.	None. During washing, hollow cucumbers usually float. Remove and use for relish.
Shriveled pickles	Placing cucumbers in too-strong brine, too heavy syrup or too strong vinegar.	Follow a reliable recipe. Use amounts of salt and sugar called for in recipe, and vinegar that is 5-percent acidity.
	Long lapse of time between gathering and brining.	Brine within 24 hours after gathering.
	Over-cooking or over-processing.	Follow a reliable recipe exactly.
	Dry weather.	No prevention.
Scum on brine surfaces while curing cucumbers	Wild yeasts, molds and bacteria that feed on the acid, thus reducing the concentration if allowed to accumulate.	Remove scum as often as needed.
Dark or discolored pickles (if brass, copper or zinc utensils were used do not use the pickles)	Minerals in hard water.	Use soft water.
	Ground spices used.	Use whole spices.
	Spices left in pickles.	Place spices loosely in cheesecloth bag so they can be removed before canning.
	Brass, iron, copper or zinc utensils used.	Use unchipped enamelware, glass, stainless steel or stoneware utensils.
	Iodized salt used.	Use canning or pickling salt.
Spotted, dull or faded color.	Cucumbers not well cured (brined).	Use brine of proper concentration. Complete fermentation process.
	Excessive exposure to light.	Store in a dark, dry, cool place.
	Cucumber of poor quality.	Work with good-quality produce.
White sediment in crock or jar.	Bacteria cause this during fermentation.	None.
	Salt contains an anti-caking agent.	Use canning or pickling salt.

Source:

Reynolds, Susan and Paulette Williams. *So Easy to Preserve*. Bulletin 989. Cooperative Extension Service, the University of Georgia, Athens. Revised by Elizabeth Andress and Judy Harrison (1999).

This information has been reviewed and adapted for use in South Carolina by P.H. Schmutz, HGIC Information Specialist, and E.H. Hoyle, Extension Food Safety Specialist, Clemson University. (New 4/99. Revised 8/00.)

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