



# Food Safety & Nutrition

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## Fruit Pickles

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The abundant supply of fresh fruits available this month makes my taste buds jump for joy! But I want to preserve these tastes for the winter months. There are many ways to preserve the taste of summer. Most of us take the peaches, pears, apricots and other fruits and freeze, can or make them into jams or jellies. But, have you thought about pickling some of your fruit?

Fruit Pickles are prepared from whole or sliced fruits and simmered in spicy, sweet-sour syrup made with vinegar or lemon juice. The pickled fruit can add spice to meals and snacks. The blending of spices, sugar and vinegar with fruits and vegetables creates a crisp, firm texture and a pungent, sweet-sour flavor.

The process is very easy.

**Fruit:** First select firm fruit. Pears and peaches may need to be a little under ripe for best pickling. For best quality, plan to pickle the fruits within 24 hours of harvest. If the produce cannot be used immediately, refrigerate it, or spread it where it will be well ventilated and cool.

Just before pickling, sort the fruit and select the size best suited for the specific recipe. Wash well, especially around the stems. Soil trapped here can be a source of bacteria responsible for the softening of the pickled product. Do not use fruits that show even slight evidence of mold. Proper processing kills potential spoilage organisms but does not destroy the off-flavor that may have already been produced by mold growth on the fruit or vegetables.

**Vinegar:** Use cider or white vinegar of 5-percent acidity. This is the range of acidity for most commercially bottled vinegars. Cider vinegar has a good flavor and aroma, but may darken white or light-colored fruits. White distilled vinegar is with pears where clearness of color is desired. Do not use homemade vinegar or vinegar of unknown acidity in pickling. Do not dilute the vinegar unless the recipe specifies. If a less sour product is preferred, add sugar rather than dilute the vinegar.

The level of acidity in a pickled product is as important to its safety as it is to its taste and texture. Never alter the proportions of vinegar, food or water in a recipe. Use only tested recipes. By doing so, you can help prevent the growth of *Clostridium botulinum*, the bacteria that produces a highly toxic poison in low acid foods.

**Sugar:** Use white sugar unless the recipe calls for brown. White sugar gives a product a lighter color, but brown sugar may be preferred for flavor. sugar helps to plump the pickles and keep them firm. Sugar substitutes are not usually recommended, as heat and/or storage may alter their flavor. If you plan to use a sugar substitute, follow recipes developed for these products.

**Spices:** Use fresh whole spices for the best quality and flavor in pickles. Powdered spices may cause the product to darken and become cloudy. Pickles will darken less if you tie whole spices loosely in a clean white cloth or cheesecloth bag and then remove the bag from the product before packing the jars. Spices deteriorate and quickly lose their pungency in heat and humidity. Therefore, store any unused spices in an airtight container in a cool place.

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Processing is necessary for all pickles to destroy the yeasts, molds and bacteria that may cause the product to spoil and also to inactivate enzymes that could affect the color, flavor and texture of the pickled product. As in all canning, a seal is necessary on the jar to prevent other microorganisms from entering. Because they are high acid foods, they are processed in a boiling water bath canner.

So, when you harvest or purchase all those lovely peaches, pears and apricots in the next few weeks, consider pickling a few!

## Pickled Pears

Yield 7-8 pints

8 cups sugar	4 cups white vinegar
2 cups water	8 cinnamon sticks (2-inch pieces)
2 tablespoons cloves, whole	2 tablespoons allspice, whole
8 pounds pears	

Combine sugar, vinegar, water and cinnamon; add cloves and allspice that are tied in a clean, thin, white cloth. Bring to a boil and simmer, covered about 30 minutes.

Wash pears, remove skins, and the entire blossom end; the stems may be left on if desired. To prevent peeled pears from darkening during preparation, immediately put them into cold water containing 2 tablespoons each of salt and vinegar per gallon. Drain just before using.

Add pears to the boiling syrup and continue simmering for 20-25 minutes. Pack hot pears into clean, hot pint jars; add one 2-inch piece cinnamon stick per jar and cover with boiling syrup to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch from top of jar. Adjust jar lids.

Process in boiling water bath canner for 20 minutes.

## Pickled Peaches

Yield: 7-8 pints

8 pounds small or medium-sized prepared peaches	2 tablespoons whole cloves
4 two-inch pieces stick cinnamon	4- $\frac{1}{2}$ cups sugar
4 cups vinegar	2 cups water

Wash and peel peaches. Put cloves and cinnamon loosely in a clean, thin white cloth and tie tip tightly. Cook together spices, sugar, vinegar and water for 10 minutes. Add peaches; cook slowly until tender, but not broken. Let set overnight refrigerated.

In the morning remove spices. Drain syrup from peaches; boil syrup rapidly until thickened. Pack peaches in hot sterilized jars. Pour hot syrup over peaches, filling jars to top. Process 20 minutes in boiling water bath canner.

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## Spiced Apple Rings

Yield: 8-9 pints

12 pounds firm tart apples

12 cups sugar

6 cups water

1-½ cups white vinegar

3 tablespoons whole cloves

¾ cup red-hot cinnamon candies or 8 cinnamon sticks (optional)

Wash apples. To prevent discoloration, peel and core one apple at a time. Immediately cut crosswise into ½ inch rings and immerse in an anti-darkening solution.

To make flavored syrup, combine sugar, water, vinegar, cloves, cinnamon candies in a 6-quart saucepan. Heat to a boil, stirring constantly. Simmer 3 minutes. Remove apples from anti-darkening solution and drain well. Add to hot syrup and cook 5 minutes.

Fill half-pint or pint jars (wide mouth work best) with apple rings leaving ½ inch headspace. Fill jars to ½ -inch from top with hot syrup. Remove air bubbles. Wipe jar rims. Attach two-piece lids and process for 10 minutes in a boiling water bath.

## Watermelon Pickles

3 quarts watermelon rind, unpared

¾ cup salt

3 quarts water

2 quarts ice cubes (2 trays)

9 cups sugar

3 cups white vinegar

3 cups water

1-tablespoon whole cloves

6 cinnamon sticks, 1-inch pieces

1 lemon, thinly slices, with seeds removed

Pare rind and all pink edges from the watermelon. Cut into 1-inch squares or fancy shapes as desired. Cover with brine made by mixing the salt with 3 quarts cold water. Add ice cubes. Let stand 3-4 hours.

Drain; rinse in cold water. Cover with cold water and cook until fork tender, about 10 minutes (do not overcook). Drain.

Combine sugar, vinegar, water and spices (tied in a clean, thin, white cloth). Boil 5 minutes and pour over the watermelon; add lemon slices. Let stand overnight.

Heat watermelon in syrup to boiling and cook slowly 1 hour. Pack hot pickles loosely into clean hot pint jars. To each jar add 1 piece of stick cinnamon from spice bag; cover with boiling syrup leaving 1/2 -inch headspace. Process in boiling water canner for 5 minutes.

Note: Red or green food coloring may be added to the syrup if desired.

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