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viola whitacre's 1952 bread and butter pickles

adapted by Nancy Schaefer

THESE EXCEPTIONAL PICKLES--extra thin and very sweet--are in more of a light syrup than a brine. They can be cold-packed as refrigerator pickles, or hot-packed in a boiling-water bath, doubling their shelf life from about six months to a year or so. The recipe presumes familiarity with basic canning.

Ingredients

- 8 quarts small kirbies (about 32-36 pickling cucumbers—choose small ones no more than 5 inches long and 1½ inches diameter so the seeds will be very small)
- 1 dozen small white bulb onions (2 inches diameter or smaller)
- 4 large red bell peppers
- 1 cup canning salt (don't be frightened of this amount—you wash it off before you make the pickles)
- ice cubes
- 1 quart white vinegar and 1 quart cider vinegar
- 10 cups of granulated sugar
- 3 teaspoons turmeric
- ¼ cup mustard seed
- 1 dozen whole cloves

Steps

Wash the cukes and slice them very thin—no more than 1/8 inch—you will be repaid for this tedious task! (Note from Margaret: A mandoline would help, but Nancy is a true master with her knife, I can attest.)

Wash and peel the onions and slice them into rings about ¼-inch thick.

Wash and seed the peppers and slice them into ¼-inch strips.

Place the sliced cukes, onions and peppers in a large bowl, putting in a layer, salting it well, then placing six or so ice cubes on top before adding the next layer of vegetables, salt and ice. Cover and let stand for three hours.

If you are going to can your pickles, get everything ready to do that while you wait.

Whether you plan to hot or cold pack, with a half hour to go, make the pickling liquid now, too:

Mix 1 quart white vinegar and 1 quart cider vinegar in a large non-reactive pot (no aluminum or untreated cast iron; stainless or enamelware are ideal).

Add 10 cups of granulated sugar, 3 teaspoons turmeric, ¼-cup mustard seed, and 1 dozen whole cloves. Stir this together well and bring it to a boil, covered.

Rinse and drain the bowl of sliced vegetables, and repeat by refilling the bowl with fresh tepid water and drain again, three times. Drain very well, then add the mix to your pot of (furiously) boiling pickling liquid. Make sure the sliced vegetables are immersed, then cover the pot and bring it back to a gentle boil.

If you are going to can them, you want to have everything ready to start doing that now. Process the filled jars of pickles and liquid in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes.

Alternatively, for refrigerator pickles, simmer the pot of cukes for an extra 5 minutes, and ladle them (with the liquid) into clean jars. Once cooled, keep them in the fridge. They will keep quite well for six months or so. Canned jars are good for a year or more on the shelf—if they last that long!

The recipe can be successfully halved, but doubling it is not recommended, as it is too much to process at one time. Makes 13 or 14 pints.

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