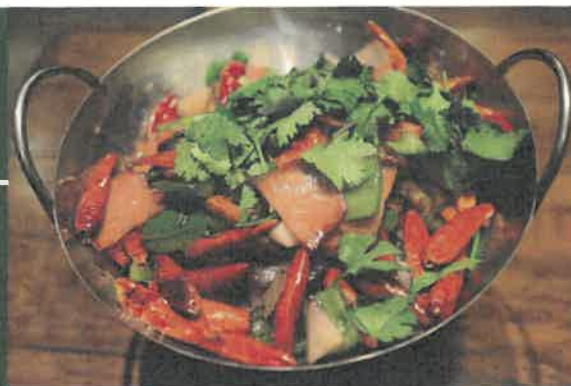


PICKLING CHILI PEPPERS

by Theresa Siebert



Chili peppers can easily be pickled in a brine or vinegar solution, alone or with other vegetables and seasoning. The bright-coloured chilies make an attractive pickle. Certain varieties can be pickled as whole pods, while larger peppers are cut into strips.

HARVESTING:

Chilies are harvested at full maturity. Pickling is done by hand at 7–14-day intervals over a harvesting period of about 3 months. The chilies are usually picked with the calyx and fruit stalks attached to prevent bacteria and fungi from infecting the scar left by the removal of the calyx.

STORAGE:

Harvested chilies may be stored for up to 14 days under cool, humid conditions, with good ventilation to remove the accumulating ethylene that will accelerate the fruit ripening and senescence. Storage temperatures of between 7–10°C and a relative humidity of 95% are recommended.

WASHING:

The harvested chilies are washed in water that may be chlorinated up to 100ppm chlorine. After washing the excess water is removed by draining (or spin-drying or blow-drying if such equipment is available).

INGREDIENTS:

Peppers:

Choose peppers that are firm, fresh and free from damage such as bruises, blemishes, and insect damage. Pickling must be done as soon as possible after harvesting.

Salt:

Only plain salt designated for use in canning or pickling should be used; table salt must be avoided as it contains additives that will make the pickling liquids cloudy and the iodine in iodised salt turns the peppers dark. As the salt in the pickling of peppers is used for seasoning, it may be safely omitted by those on sodium-restricted diets.

Vinegar:

Use only good, clear, standard vinegar that is free from sediment with at least 5% acetic acid or 50-grain

strength. Distilled white vinegar aids in keeping the original colour of the peppers whereas cider, wine and malt vinegar will darken the peppers a bit, although they may still be used if so desired. Unless it has been tested for the percentage acid, homemade vinegar must not be used. To prevent the loss of acetic acid, long boiling of the vinegar must be avoided.

PREPARATION:

The chilies may be peeled if desired using the following method: slash between 2 and 4 slits in each chili and then heat it in a gas flame or under a broiler until the skin separates from the flesh. Place the peppers in a bowl and cover, leave for between 5 and 10 minutes. The skins will then slip off easily.



Smaller peppers may be kept whole, but all peppers should be flattened to remove air and larger fruit cut into quarters. The chilies are packed into the canning jars, leaving a headspace of about 1cm. The vinegar, water, sugar, salt, and garlic (see recipe below) are combined, heated, and allowed to simmer for 10 minutes after which the garlic is removed, and the solution is poured over the peppers, again leaving a 1cm headspace. Any trapped air bubbles are removed from the jar by running a plastic knife or spatula between the food and the jar, after which the jars are wiped clean with a clean, damp cloth and the lids and ring bands secured.

A typical recipe would be as follows:

- 1.8kg chili peppers
- 0.7kg green bell peppers
- 0.7kg red bell peppers
- 1.25L vinegar (5%)
- 250ml water
- 10ml sugar
- 20ml canning or pickling salt
- 2 cloves garlic

Select and clean jars and lids carefully. Discard any chipped or cracked jars and always use new lids. The ring bands may be reused but replace any that are dented or show signs of rust. Clean jars with hot, soapy water and then rinse well.

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For the successful canning of the pickled chilies, the following steps must be observed:

- Prepare all lids according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Fill the cleaned jars with peppers leaving a 1cm headspace.
- Cover the peppers with the hot brine, remembering to leave a 1cm headspace.
- Remove air bubbles from the jars.
- Clean jars after filling.
- Place a heated lid in the jar and secure it using the ring band. Again, remember to follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Place the jars in a water bath canner with a rack. The rack is used to prevent the jars from touching the bottom of the canner to allow the water to circulate around the jars. Add enough water to cover the tops of the jars to a depth of at least 2.5cm.
- Begin timing the process when the water bath temperature reaches a gentle boil, at about 83°C. Process the jars for the time indicated in the table below and do not substitute larger jars for those specified as this will result in an under-processed and unsafe product. At altitudes higher than 1000ft above sea level, processing times are longer, and the processing times need to be adjusted accordingly.
- When the processing time is up and the jars are removed from the canner, hold them level and do not disrupt the seal. The ring bands must be left in place until the jars have cooled thoroughly.
- For cooling, the jars can be placed on a rack or folded towel, away from drafts and cool surfaces, and separated from each other. The jars must be allowed to cool, undisturbed, for at least 24 hours, after which the ring bands must be removed before storing the jars.
- If the jars have not been sealed for some reason, they may either be stored in the refrigerator for immediate use, or reprocessed. Reprocessing lowers the quality of the end product.
- When the jars have cooled, check that all the lids have sealed properly. If the jars have sealed correctly, the lids should be concave and should not give when pressed in the centre.

The recommended processing time for hot pickled peppers in a water bath canner is as follows for pint-size containers:

- 10 minutes at 0-1000ft altitude
- 15 minutes at 1001-6000ft altitude
- 20 minutes at above 6000ft altitude

