



YIVO'S SHINE ONLINE
EDUCATIONAL SERIES

A Seat at the Table

A JOURNEY INTO JEWISH FOOD

sponsored by EDWARD BLANK AND FAMILY, THE COVENANT FOUNDATION, and THE SHINE TRUST

RECIPE COURTESY OF

The GEFILTERIA

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CLASSIC SOUR DILLS

JEFFREY: My mission to spread the sour pickle gospel brought me to Poland. I had been asked to lead a pickle demo during the Festival of Jewish Culture in Krakow. Why conference organizers wanted a New Yorker to teach Poles about pickling was beyond me. I stood at the front of a room crowded with older Polish women. "Who here has made pickles before?" I asked through my translator. Every single hand shot up. UH-OH. WHAT DO I SAY TO THIRTY OR SO WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN MAKING PICKLES AS LONG AS I'VE BEEN ALIVE? Not much—I decided I'd rather learn from them. Our discussion

quickly turned contentious. "You use too much salt," one woman yelled. Another told me that I wasn't letting the pickles ferment long enough. And while we could all agree that a mushy pickle is a pox on your house, their tricks to keep cucumbers crunchy ranged from tannin-rich leaves to ice-water baths to horseradish root.

The demo concluded with a discussion of the best cucumber varieties to use for pickling. Finally, a simple topic. Always select thin, small cucumbers. The lower the water content in the cucumber, the better. In the United States, the best cucumbers for pickling are usually Kirby cucumbers. Persian cucumbers work, too, but not as consistently, we've found. Avoid long, waxy English cucumbers. On the pickle farm we called them "slicers" with as much derision as we could muster.

Note that this recipe calls for an extended wait time of up to 7 days. Also, pickling your cucumbers whole increases the likelihood of a crunchy pickle. Slice or spear your cucumbers only once they're finished for best results. The brine will likely look cloudy and a bit fizzy. That's 100 percent normal and healthy. Once you're done with the pickles, save the brine for salad dressings (page 80), Pickle Brine Bread (page 96), and Sour Dill Martinis (page 306).

► MAKES 1 GALLON PICKLES

5 pounds whole unpeeled Kirby cucumbers
(the smaller the better)

½ gallon filtered water

½ cup kosher salt

1 cinnamon stick

3 bay leaves (dried or fresh)

1 dried whole chile pepper

1 teaspoon whole coriander seeds

1 teaspoon yellow mustard seeds

1 teaspoon whole black peppercorns

½ teaspoon whole cloves

¼ bunch fresh dill, washed (leave the stems on)

1½ heads garlic, cloves separated and crushed

1. If desired, fill a large bowl or bucket with ice and water and place the cucumbers in it. Let sit for 45 minutes or up to 5 hours. This helps firm the cucumbers so they retain crunch during the fermentation process, but it's not absolutely necessary.
2. Fill a large ceramic crock or glass jar (gallon-size is ideal) halfway with the filtered water. Add the salt and stir until it has dissolved.
3. Add the remaining ingredients to the salted water, then add the cucumbers. Make sure the spices, herbs, and garlic are not simply floating on the surface.
4. **Create a seal:** If fermenting in a crock, use a plate or a wooden board to force the vegetables beneath the brine. If necessary, top with a clean glass growler or jar filled with water to ensure that the weight applies pressure on the vegetables, keeping them submerged. If fermenting in a jar, use a smaller jar filled with water to do the same (see page 45 for sealing instructions). Cover with a towel to keep out dust and bugs.
5. Let the soon-to-be-pickles sit at room temperature for 3 to 7 days. The longer they sit and ferment, the sourer they will become. At a stable room temperature, half sour pickles should take 2 to 3 days to ferment and full sour pickles should take 5 to 7 days (the amount of time may vary based on air temperature and even elevation). You'll notice that the pickles will turn paler as they ferment.
6. Once the pickles reach the desired flavor, remove any white yeast or mold (or moldy pickles) from the top of the vessel and discard them. Yeasts and molds are a natural part of the process and typically occur only on the surface, where oxygen meets the vegetables. Don't worry. (For more information on mold and yeast, see page 48.) Pack your pickles into smaller glass jars, then cover completely with brine and place directly in the refrigerator. They will keep in the refrigerator for up to 6 months.