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Pickled Beets

Makes about 4 pint jars

Most pickled beets are so achingly sweet I tend to forget I'm eating beets, or pickles. All you need is a touch of honey to mellow out the vinegar a bit.

3 pounds of beets, tops removed, scrubbed
4 cups cider vinegar (5% acidity)
1/4 cup mild honey
2 teaspoons pure kosher salt
2 cinnamon sticks
1 teaspoon whole all spice
1/2 teaspoon whole black peppercorns

Cook the beets in boiling water to cover until tender, 20 to 30 minutes. Drain and transfer to a bowl of ice water to cool. Rub off the skins, trim, quarter, and cut into 1/4-inch thick slices. Set aside.

Prepare for water-bath canning: Wash the jars and keep them hot in the canning pot, and put the flat lids in a heatproof bowl.

In a wide, 6- to 8-quart preserving pan, combine the vinegar, 1-1/2 cups water, the honey, salt, cinnamon, allspice, and peppercorns. Bring to a boil over high heat, then immediately add the beets; bring just to a simmer.

Ladle boiling water from the canning pot into the bowl with the lids. Using a jar lifter, remove the hot jars from the canning pot, carefully pouring the water from each one back into the pot, and place them upright on a folded towel. Drain the water off the jar lids.

Working quickly, using tongs or a slotted spoon, transfer the hot beets (and some of the spices) to the hot jars. Ladle or pour in the hot vinegar mixture, leaving 1/2-inch headspace at the top. Use a chopstick to remove air bubbles around the inside of each jar. Use a damp paper towel to wipe the rims of the jars, then put a flat lid and ring on each jar, adjusting the ring so that it's just finger-tight. Return the jars to the water in the canning pot, making sure the water covers the jars by at least 1 inch. Bring to a boil, and boil for 30 minutes to process. Remove the jars to a folded towel and do not disturb for 12 hours. After 1 hour, check that the lids have sealed by pressing down on the center of each; if it can be pushed down, it hasn't sealed, and the jar should be refrigerated immediately. Label the sealed jars and store.



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Pickled Beets, (continued)

Pickled Beet and Pesto Sandwiches

1 cup roughly chopped fresh cilantro
1/4 cup pepitas (hulled pumpkin seeds), toasted
1/4 cup finely grated Parmesan cheese
Pinch of salt
3 to 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
4 square-ish ciabatta rolls, split and toasted
1 pint Pickled Beets (above)
6 ounces feta cheese, sliced

Put the cilantro pepitas, Parmesan cheese, and salt in a mini food processor and pulse to finely chop. Add the oil, a tablespoon at a time, processing to make a smooth paste. Spread pesto on the cut rolls, top with the beets and feta cheese, and close to serve sandwich style.