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Quickest Kosher Dills

Makes about 4 pint jars

These are exceedingly easy and quick, perfect for when you come into a small batch of pickling cucumbers and don't want to go to the trouble of brining them, much less fermenting them.

As with all cucumber pickles, pasteurizing (heating the jars in water at 180°F for 30 minutes) rather than processing in boiling water for a shorter period will result in a slightly crisper pickle.

3 pounds pickling cucumbers (3 to 4 inches long)
2 cups cider vinegar (5% acidity)
2 tablespoons pure kosher salt
Fresh dill
4 cloves garlic
8 teaspoons pickling spice (see below)
4 dried hot red peppers, or 4 teaspoons grated fresh horseradish (optional)
Fresh young scuppernong, grape, or black currant leaves (optional)

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.

Cut off the blossom end of each cucumber; cut into spears.

In a nonreactive pot, combine the vinegar, 2 cups water, and the salt. If pasteurizing, bring the mixture to 160°F to 180°F on a candy thermometer. If processing, bring to a full boil.

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, put a few dill sprigs in each jar and divide the garlic, spices, dried peppers, and scuppernong leaves among the jars. Pack the cucumbers in the jars as snugly as you can without damaging them. Ladle the hot vinegar mixture into the jars, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. 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. If pasteurizing, bring the water in the pot to 180°F, and keep it there, adjusting the burner as necessary, for 30 minutes. (Any time the water spends below 180°F must be added to the pasteurizing time so that the water is at 180° for a total of 30 minutes). If processing, bring to a full boil, and boil for 10 minutes. 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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Quickest Kosher Dills, (continued)

Pickling Spice

To make your own pickling spice, combine all of the following (or some mustard seeds, peppercorns, and dill seeds, plus as many of the remaining spices as you have on hand) and store in an airtight container in a dark spot for up to 6 months:

- 1 tablespoon black mustard seeds
- 1 tablespoon yellow mustard seeds
- 1 tablespoon allspice berries, crushed
- 1 tablespoon dill seeds
- 1/2 tablespoon whole cloves
- 1 dried red chile, crushed
- 3 cinnamon sticks, crushed
- 1/2 nutmeg, crushed
- 3 bay leaves, crumbled
- 1 teaspoon black peppercorns
- 1 teaspoon whole coriander seeds
- 1 teaspoon cardamon pods, crushed
- 1/2 star anise pod, crushed