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The Drinks Issue



Taste

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A Quick Pickle

NO NEED TO DUST OFF THE CANNING EQUIPMENT FOR THESE FAST AND EASY PICKLE RECIPES.

By Jaime Lewis

Unless you are a devoted food preserver, chances are you've never made real pickles. The process can be laborious, lengthy, and messy. Plus, there's the whole issue of food safety. Most folks don't have the time to devote themselves to full-scale pickling when commercial pickles can easily be purchased at the local grocery store.

But in the last several years, the concept of a "quick pickle" (aka "quickle") has emerged as a work-around for the standard procedure. These fast variations rely on marination to do the job, rather than fermentation. No need to wait for those carrots, radishes, jalapeños, or onions to ferment. Just soak them in a hot brine of vinegar, sugar, salt, and spices, pop them in the fridge for a few days, and voilà: near-instant pickles, like a rabbit out of a hat.

"Nobody pickles at home, unless they're going the

distance to do that," says executive chef Jason Paluska of **The Lark** (thelarksb.com) restaurant in Santa Barbara. "Quick pickling is a good segue because the results are almost instantly gratifying."

Paluska uses several quick pickles in the restaurant, where their crisp acidity brings nuance and complexity to dishes across the menu. And the abbreviated technique produces a favorite condiment for him at home, too. "If we're making burgers," he says, "my wife will suggest making pickled red onions the day before. It's as simple as cutting the onions, pouring over the vinegar, and letting it sit in the fridge a while. And at the end, you suddenly have something that's your own specialty to add to the meal."

Here, Paluska shares three quick pickling recipes that can give your home-cooked dishes a restaurant-worthy boost using simple ingredients, a tiny bit of know-how, and only a couple days' time.

PICKLED WATERMELON RIND

This condiment may sound unusual, but it is a heritage American dish that dates back to the late 18th century. "What I love most about pickling watermelon rind is the texture," says Jason Paluska. "It's almost like pickling a cucumber, so you get the same flavor, but with more crunch and snap."

He likes to serve it with a charcuterie plate that includes fresh melon or as garnish for a cocktail like a watermelon julep.

Makes almost 1 cup

- ¼ cup watermelon rind, peeled and finely julienned
- ¼ cup champagne vinegar
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 tablespoons water
- ½ teaspoon salt

Place peeled and finely julienned rind in a nonreactive bowl. In a medium saucepan

over medium heat, bring the remaining ingredients to a boil, stirring occasionally. Remove the brine from the heat and pour it over the rind into the bowl. Seal the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate for a minimum of 72 hours. Drain before use. Keep pickled rind in the fridge for up to 1 month.

PICKLED BEECH MUSHROOMS

Beech mushrooms are so called because they often grow at the base of beech trees. "They're really tender and delicate," says Jason Paluska. "They take to the pickle really well with an unctuous creaminess." He adds that the acidity in this recipe brings brightness to the softness of the mushroom. At The Lark, Paluska and his team have paired this accompaniment with duck liver mousse. "These complement something rich like a cheese board with stone fruits and pecans," he says. >

Quick-pickling Pioneers

Andrea Wasko, president of the **Quick Pickle Kit** (quickpicklekit.com) company in Los Osos, grew up pickling with her mom in Pennsylvania. After moving three thousand miles away to California, Wasko missed those pickles so much she set out to develop a way to make them herself—only faster. In 1996 she launched the Quick Pickle Kit, which includes a reusable glass jar and gasket, a spice packet, a cookbook, a quick start guide, and a hotline to call for assistance.

"A lot of people are wanting to do things at home but don't have the skill set," Wasko says. "The Quick Pickle Kit is a lot like 'pickling for dummies.' It's for people who remember grandma's pickles but don't have the time or aren't comfortable or confident in their skills."



Makes 1 pint

- ½ cup beech mushrooms, bases removed (available at Whole Foods Markets)
- ½ cup cider vinegar
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon salt
- ¼ cup water

Put the mushrooms in a nonreactive bowl. In a medium saucepan over medium-low heat, bring the vinegar, sugar, salt, and water to a simmer. Remove the mixture from the heat and pour over the mushrooms. Seal the bowl with plastic wrap and let the mushrooms marinate in the refrigerator for a minimum

of 72 hours. Drain before use. Keep pickled mushrooms in the fridge for up to 1 month.

PICKLED OKRA

“This is a nod to Southern cuisine,” says Jason Paluska, who is originally from Houston. “It’s a really flavorful pickle with the pickled mustard seeds.” Paluska recommends pairing these with fried chicken, as he has at times on The Lark menu, or with Mediterranean-style lamb.

Makes about 1 pint

- 10 whole okra
- ½ cup champagne vinegar

- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 tablespoon mustard seeds
- 1 tablespoon chile flakes
- ¼ cup sugar
- ¼ cup water

Place the okra in a nonreactive bowl. In a medium saucepan over medium-low heat, bring the vinegar, salt, mustard seeds, chile flakes, sugar, and water to a simmer. Remove the mixture from heat and pour over the okra. Seal the bowl with plastic wrap and allow the okra to marinate in the refrigerator for a minimum of 72 hours. Drain before use. Keep pickled okra in the fridge for up to 1 month. ♦

Don’t Let That Brine Go To Waste!

Since the moment olives and martinis met, cocktails have enjoyed a cozy relationship with briny veggies.

“We have more than a few cocktail creations that have come about during our history,” says Bradley Bennett, founder of **Pacific Pickle Works™** (pacificpickleworks.com) in Santa Barbara. Not unlike the olive brine that’s critical to a dirty martini, he says, pickle brine

plays well with certain spirits for savory cocktails. Here, Bennett shares two recipes developed by mixologist Alvaro Rojas of **Milk & Honey Tapas** (milknhoneytapas.com) in Santa Barbara, using brine from Pacific Pickle Works’ products and **Cutler’s Artisan Spirits** gin (cutlersartisan.com) from Santa Barbara.



UNBEETABLE MARTINI

Makes 1 cocktail

- 1 fluid ounce pickled beet brine from a jar of Pacific Pickle Works Unbeetables
- 1½ fluid ounces Cutler’s Artisan Spirits gin
- ¾ fluid ounce lemon juice
- ¼ fluid ounce simple syrup
- Pinch of salt

Pre-chill a coupe-style martini glass. Combine all ingredients in a shaker with ice and shake well until very cold. Strain ingredients into the chilled glass. Garnish with edible micro flowers and a skewered slice of pickled beet.



FENN SHUI VESPER

Makes 1 cocktail

- ¾ fluid ounce pickled fennel brine from a jar of Pacific Pickle Works Fenn Shui
- 2 fluid ounces Cutler’s gin
- 1 fluid ounce Cutler’s vodka
- ½ fluid ounce Lillet Blanc

Pre-chill a Nick & Nora-style martini glass. Combine all ingredients in a shaker with ice and shake until very cold. Strain into chilled glass. Garnish with a skewered slice of pickled fennel and a bachelor’s button flower.