

REFERENCE NOTES

February 2020

A PECK OF PICKLES: A HISTORY OF PICKLES

Love them or hate them, pickles have been a part of the human diet for millenniaⁱ. Dill, kosher, sweet, spicy, sour, whole, spears, shredded or slices; they are a part of nearly every modern cuisine on the planet. Cucumbers (the most common form of pickle in the US) are mentioned twice in the bible (Numbers 11:5 and Isaiah 1:8) and several times in Shakespeare's playsⁱⁱ.

What is a pickle? On a scientific level, anything submerged in an acidic liquid (such as vinegar) or a heavily salted brine (causing anaerobic fermentation) until they are no longer able to spoil is considered a pickle. On a practical level, the proper preservation of food was essential for human survival, especially in the days before modern refrigeration and the introduction of chemical preservatives. Pickling served as a relatively simple and labor-free method of ensuring a source of food. The process was so revered by the ancient Lithuanians that they even had a god of pickled and fermented foods called Roguszysⁱⁱⁱ. During long winter months or on long sea voyages, our ancestors used pickled eggs and meat (such as herring) to survive in between harvests or resupply.

Pickles are not limited to cucumbers. Cabbage, root vegetables, fish and other meats are often preserved using pickling methods. Peppers and okra are also very popular, especially in the American South. Internationally, pickled cabbage in Korea (kimchee) and the Germanic nations (sauerkraut) serve as a staple food. Hated by some, pickled pigs' feet are popular in the American South, Mexico and China where their high level of fat and flavor are considered a delicacy. Sour flavors predominate the Japanese pallets, while spiced pickles are most popular in Middle Eastern cuisine^{iv}. Pickles need not even be solid, going back to Roman times, a fermented and pickled fish sauce called "garum" was hugely popular^v. In modern times, vinegar-based sauces, often created using a pickling or fermenting process such as

Worcestershire, Fish Sauce, Tamari and Soy, are still popular.

Montgomery has a deep connection to pickles, having once been the home of the Whitfield Pickle Company (W&W Pickle Company), which later became Whitfield Foods, Inc. Their motto, "The Pickle with the Perfect Pucker" is still known in the city today. Though they gave up producing pickles in the 1970's, they still manufacture the much beloved Alaga Syrup.

Pickles are everywhere, in every cultural cuisine and in nearly every pantry. From the mundane to the exotic, it's a part of human culinary history that is not likely to disappear. With the resurgence of environmentally-friendly methods of preservation and the push for organic and natural farming techniques, it seems like the pickle, in all its form, will remain part of our diet for millennia to come.

ⁱ Daphne L. Derven, "Preserving," in *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture: Volume 3: Obesity to Zoroastrianism*, Index, ed. Solomon H. Katz (New York: Thomson Gale, 2003), 152.

ⁱⁱ "Pickle History Timeline" www.nyfoodmuseum.org Accessed: 13 December 2017.

ⁱⁱⁱ Shephard, Sue. *Pickled, Potted, and Canned: How the Art of Science of Food Preserving Changed the World*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 134.

^{iv} Shephard, Sue. *Pickled, Potted, and Canned: How the Art of Science of Food Preserving Changed the World*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 96.

^v Shephard, Sue. *Pickled, Potted, and Canned: How the Art of Science of Food Preserving Changed the World*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 102.

Peck of Pickles: Pathfinder

Databases and General Research Tips:

Searching "pickles" in any of our EBSCO or Gale databases will produce a lot of results. Our EBSCO

Discovery service alone provided over 220,000 results which included eBooks, eAudio books, articles and other resources. Many websites offer tips, recipes and ready-made pickles for purchase. You might also consider speaking to friends and family, as food culture and traditions are often passed down orally. Here are some specific sources that might provide further detail.

General Non-Fiction:

Davison, Jan. *Pickles: A Global History*. Islington, United Kingdom: Reaktion, 2018.

Kurlansky, Mark. *Salt: A World History*. New York: Walker and Company, 2002.

Shephard, Sue. *Pickled, Potted, and Canned: How the Art and Science of Food Preserving Changed the World*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001.

Cookbooks:

Cross, Eliza. *101 Things to Do with a Pickle*. Layton, Utah : Gibbs Smith, 2014.

Man-Jo, Kim. *The Kimchee Cookbook*. North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 1999.

Shockey, Christopher. *Fermented Vegetables*. North Adams, MA: Storey Publishing, 2014.

Solomon, Karen. *Asian Pickles*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 2014.

Ziedrich, Linda. *The Joy of Pickling*, 3rd ed. Boston: Harvard Common Press, 2016.

Children's Books:

Barrett, Judi. *Pickles to Pittsburgh*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2000. Reprint.

Morse, Scott. *Magic Pickle*. New York : Graphix, 2008.

Wight, Eric. *Frankie Pickle and the Closet of Doom*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010. Reprint.

Websites:

National Center for Home Food Preservation - <http://nchfp.uga.edu/>

This site, from the University of Georgia with information from the USDA, provides information not just about pickling, but many other forms of food preservation, such as canning, curing and drying.

Producers:

Baker Creek Seeds – www.rareseeds.com

If you want to try growing your own cucumbers (or vegetables) to pickle you can't go wrong with Baker Creek. They only sell heirloom, GMO free seeds.

Mount Olive Pickle Company, Inc. – www.mtolivepickles.com

Headquartered out of North Carolina, this pickle producer has been puckering faces for over 90 years. Their website offers recipes and games as well as a listing of products.

Vlasic Pickles – vlasic.com

Vlasic Pickles have been on the market since 1942, though the company is now owned by Pinnacle Foods. They are quite proud of their Michigan heritage and only use Michigan grown cucumbers. Their website features recipes and a listing of products.

Wickles Pickles – www.wicklespickles.com

Though this Alabama based company started in 1998, the family has held the recipe for 90 years. These pickle products are not for the faint of heart as they pack quite a kick! The website also features recipes and apparel.

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Figure 1: W & W Pickle Company truck at the Alabama-Georgia Syrup Company (later Whitfield Foods, Inc.) building at 1135 North Court Street in Montgomery, Alabama. (Alabama Department of Archives & History)

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