

Asparagus Season!
by Summer Brasuel
UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County

Pickled asparagus is a favorite among home preservers. It is great on a party tray, serves as a side dish, or chopped up and added to potato or pasta salads.

Flavoring pickles can easily be customized. Dried herbs and spices do not affect the safety of a tested pickle recipe. If you do not like dill, maybe you would prefer to substitute Italian seasonings, Mexican seasonings, or even curry.

Other fun ways to safely customize your home preserved pickles is to change the type of vinegar. Maybe change a white vinegar to a cider vinegar for sweeter taste. It is important is to make sure the vinegar you use is 5% acidity or more. The level of acidity is on the label. Be aware that in recent years some bargain brand vinegars are less than 5% acidity. Always read the label.

When using cider vinegar, make sure it is not "cider flavored" vinegar. Although there is not a safety issue related to "cider flavored" vinegar we think the flavor is inferior to real cider vinegar. Again, read the label carefully.

Here is a bit of science for you. Green asparagus naturally contains rutin and it is nutritionally good for us! Some pickled asparagus may develop whitish or yellowish crystals after being stored in the jar for a few months. Rutin reacts to the iron in our water and forms these crystals on the pickled asparagus. The pickles are perfectly safe to eat. And you can wipe the crystals off if you have a picky eater at your table. If you have a high iron content in your tap water, then these crystals may develop more often. If the rutin crystals are unappetizing then consider using bottled water when you make your pickled asparagus.

Pickled Asparagus
For six wide-mouth pint jars

10 pounds asparagus
6 large garlic cloves
4½ cups water
4½ cups white distilled vinegar (5%)
6 small hot peppers (optional)
½ cup canning salt
3 teaspoons dill seed

Procedure:

1. Wash and rinse canning jars; keep hot until ready to use. Prepare lids according to manufacturer's directions.
2. Wash asparagus well, but gently, under running water. Cut stems from the bottom to leave spears with tips that fit into the canning jar with a little less than ½-inch headspace. Peel and wash garlic cloves. Place a garlic clove at the bottom of each jar, and tightly pack asparagus into jars with the blunt ends down.

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3. In an 8-quart Dutch oven or saucepot, combine water, vinegar, hot peppers (optional), salt and dill seed. Bring to a boil. Place one hot pepper (if used) in each jar over asparagus spears. Pour boiling hot pickling brine over spears, leaving ½-inch headspace.
4. Remove air bubbles and adjust headspace if needed. Wipe rims of jars with a dampened, clean paper towel; apply two-piece metal canning lids.
5. PROCESS in a boiling water or atmospheric steam canner for: 0-6000 ft. = 10 minutes, above 6000 ft. = 15 minutes.

For boiling water canning, turn off the heat, remove canner lid and wait 5 minutes. For atmospheric steam canning, turn off the heat, leave canner lid on and wait 2-3 minutes.

Check lids for seal after 24 hours. Lid should not flex up and down when center is pressed. Label and store in a cool, dry place.

Allow pickled asparagus to sit in processed jars for 3 to 5 days before consumption for best flavor development.

In response to Coronavirus (COVID-19) and recent California Department of Public Health and El Dorado County Health & Human Services guidelines, UCCE Central Sierra canceled all Master Food Preserver and Master Gardener public events and classes in El Dorado and Amador County. This cancellation remains in effect until the stay-at-home order is lifted and we are able to meet in-person again, and will be updated as public health guidelines change.

Stay safe and follow recommended health and sanitation practices in the coming weeks.

UCCE Master Food Preservers are available to answer home food preservation questions; leave a message on our helpline at (530) 621-5506. For more information about our public education classes and activities or to make a donation, go to the UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmfp>. Sign up to receive our E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mfpcsenews>.

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