

Relishing Your Garden

By Teri Akers, UCCE Master Food Preserver of El Dorado County
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Relish is an incredibly versatile condiment, and you can make it with just about anything grown in your garden! Relish is for more than hot dogs and burgers—and it doesn't have to be made from pickles. So what actually is relish? And what can be used to make it? You can try any fruits or vegetables in season, from tomatoes and corn to cranberries and apples.

My affection for making and preserving relishes came just last year when I made my first “Cucumber Dill Relish”. I had 15 lbs of pickling cucumbers from my garden and thought, “These are too big for pickles so I’ll make relish!” So, 10 pints later I was hooked! Corn and football size zucchini made for good relish (so yummy by the way!) but a fresh fruit relish is next on my list. As we come to an end of this stone fruit season we should all try our hand at fruit relishes!

Why Is It Called a Relish?

The common thought is the word "relish" originated from the early French word "reles" which translates to "remainder" or "leftover." This could be from relishes being used to preserve leftover or excess vegetables and fruits. Eventually the word evolved into "relish" meaning "appetizing flavor" and that title was attached to the condiment we know and love today.

In the United States, the most common relish is made from chopped pickled cucumbers, either dill or sweet pickles. It’s used as a topping on sandwiches, burgers and hot dogs. But in other parts of the world, popular relishes are made with other ingredients. In England, piccalilli is a turmeric-spiced relish made from cauliflower and other vegetables that’s served alongside ham, sausage or toast. In El Salvador, curtido (made from cabbage, onions and carrots) is served with pupusas, while Italy has mostarda, a fruit relish that’s served with fatty or rich meats.

What do all of these relishes have in common? Vinegar. It not only preserves the fruit and vegetables, but also brings relish’s characteristic acidic tang. Without it, relish would be nothing more than a slaw or a salad! (Vinegar also makes vegetables a high acid food, allowing you to can it in either a boiling water or atmospheric steam canner.)

Relish vs. Chutney

You may wonder about how chutney and relish are very similar. Like relish, chutney is made from fruits or vegetables, and also contains vinegar, sugar and spices. The main difference between the two is a matter of consistency. The ingredients in relish are cooked in the spiced vinegar, but they maintain their texture and bite. Chutney, on the other hand, is usually slow-cooked until the ingredients break down and become soft. This long cooking time also tends to make chutney thicker than relish, which has a looser texture.

If you want to know more about relishes, learn some recipes, or check out our classes, please go to the statewide UC Master Food Preserver website at <http://mfp.ucanr.edu> and the local UCCE Master Food Preservers of Central Sierra at: https://ucanr.edu/sites/mfp_of_cs/ (Archived Recipes).

The UC Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County are a great resource for answers to your preserving questions. Leave a message at (530) 621-5506 or email us at edmfp@ucanr.edu. Sign up to receive our eNewsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpcsenews/> . Find us on Facebook, too (UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County)!