

- Speaker 1: [00:00](#) Welcome to the old fashioned on purpose podcast. In today's episode, we are diving into the problem that has plagued pickle makers for centuries. How do you find a pickle recipe that results in perfectly crisp cucumbers? With that highly sought after crunch? I'm excited to share my best tips with you today to make this happen. I'm your host Jill Winger, and for the last 10 years I've been helping people just like you who feel a little uninspired by modern life. I'll show you how to create the life you really want by growing your own food and mastering old fashioned skills. In the past when I go to make homemade pickles and have the cucumbers in the colander and bring the big pots out of the basement, Christian, my husband would always raise an eyebrow and say in this questioning tone of voice, they're going to be crunchy pickles.
- Speaker 1: [01:09](#) Right? And I would respond with false confidence. Sure. Honey, you bet. Honestly, it took me quite awhile to figure out how to actually get crunchy pickles because for the longest time I was the queen of the smooshy ones that you know are a little soggy and a little mushy in the jar. I tried all sorts of things over the years. I've made a lot of pickles. For some reason cucumbers love Wyoming so they'd grow well here. And like anything else, I found that if you talk to a dozen different people to get their pickle making advice, you get a dozen different answers. So in my quest for the ultimate crunchy pickle recipe, because yes, I really do care about such things. As silly as it sounds, I have collected a number of little tricks that I think might be helpful to you if you have this same issue.
- Speaker 1: [02:13](#) Now keep in mind you do not have to use all of these tricks at the same time, but mix and match and use a combination of them that suits your situation and the cucumbers that you have available. So without further ado, here are my five secrets for crunchy homemade pickles. Okay. Number one is probably by far the most important one on the list. Okay. It is drum roll. Please use small cucumbers. I realize as I say this, this is easier said than done. Please tell me I'm not alone because year I grow cucumbers. You know I plant them, they come up, I weed them, I watch them, there's no pickles in sight and I think in about another month or two I'll be ready to start canning. We probably get some fruit on the vine, you know, just going to take awhile. And then usually about a week after I think that I go out to the garden and there are cucumbers, the size of baseball bats laying there under the plants and I go, I do not know how on earth they got there because a week ago there was nothing.

Speaker 1: [03:35](#) Please tell me I'm all not alone with this because it happens to me every year. It's almost getting embarrassing now. All that to say baseball bat cucumbers do not make good pickles. You can do other things with them. Avoid pickles. You really need to pick them when they're small and cute in order for them to be crunchy. Okay. And it's kind of a natural law. If you are using ginormous overgrown cucumbers for your homemade pickles, nothing will turn them crunchy. I don't care how many prayers you say or how many tricks you use. They are just gonna be soft. So tip number one means you have to check your plants frequently, which is something I'm still trying to learn how to do. Or if you're getting pickles from the farmer's market or the grocery store, make sure you are selecting pickling cucumbers. It really does matter because you know your traditional long, big cucumbers you used for salads, they're not firm and they're just not gonna make as desirable pickles.

Speaker 1: [04:45](#) So get pickling cucumbers and pick the small ones. And I even squeeze them like as I'm picking them off the farmer's market, a booth or I'm picking them out of the garden. I'm picking the ones that don't have a lot of give when I squeeze them. And those are the ones I'm going to prioritize turning into pickles. If you do end up in the garden with some big ginormous cucumbers, even if they're pickling cucumbers, they're still good for slicing. My kids still eat them. We still put them in salads. There's still great with ranch dressing. Just leave them out of the jars. Okay. Tip number two goes right along with number one. Maybe not quite as crucial but still pretty darn important and that is to pickle them immediately after picking or as soon as possible. If you can go straight from the vine to the jar, that is going to set you up for the most success and the crunchiest pickles.

Speaker 1: [05:53](#) When I'm growing cucumbers in the garden and I know I'm going to pick them, I try coordinate the picking with the pickle making on the same day if possible or the following day. Now I realize if you're not growing them, you don't have full control over when they're picked. So if you're at the farmer's market or the supermarket shopping for pickling cucumbers, like I said before, you're going to just check that the ones you're getting are firm and hard and small. And then when you do get them home, make sure you don't leave them on the counter for days and days before you get around to pickling them. The fresher, the better. And that will give you the crunchiest pickles in the end. Okay. Number three, soak your cucumbers in an ice water bath for a couple of hours before canning. If I can't get to work on my pickles immediately after I get them out of the garden or I get home from the farmer's market, I will put them in a bowl.

- Speaker 1: [06:55](#) Or sometimes I'll put them in a big stockpot if I don't have room for a giant bowl in the fridge and I'll put them in, put cold water and a lot of ice and let them soak. And sometimes that's even a good idea for a super fresh cucumbers. If you know you're canning in the afternoon, just stick them in the ice water bath in the morning. And they just tend to firm up quite a bit during that ice bath and that will definitely help with their crispness. Okay. These last two tips are a little more at your own discretion and I think some of these have been passed around more a little bit like old wives tales. Maybe not completely, I haven't seen as big of results from doing these two things, but it definitely doesn't hurt. So if you're just trying to set yourself up for the most success possible with your pickles, doesn't hurt to try it.
- Speaker 1: [07:52](#) Okay. So number four, secret number four is to cut the blossom ind off of the cucumber. It is said, and again, I don't have scientific research to back this up, but it is said that that blossom end, which would be the pickle, the part of the pickle that had, well sometimes they get the, the yellow blossoms, it has enzymes in it that can cause mushiness. So trimming it off is your best bet. Um, when I have little tiny cute cucumbers, I don't always trim this off unless it's a really big blossom there. But for my more medium sized cucumbers, I definitely just trim it. I don't take a lot of the cucumber off. Just shave it off and call it good. Along with that one, number five, you can add tannins in the jar. So tannins are something that is found naturally in oak leaves, grape leaves, or in black tea.
- Speaker 1: [08:55](#) Now I find this trick, when you go online and search for crunchy pickles, this trick is always, always, always recommended. But I've honestly had pretty hit or miss results with it. So if you have oak leaves or grape leaves handy, you know, if you have them growing outside and it's easy for you to get them, it definitely doesn't hurt to toss one in each jar or a couple. But I wouldn't go out of your way or spend a lot of money trying to get grape leaves shipped in. Another option, if you want to try the whole tannin idea, but you don't want to find grape leaves, is to add a half teaspoon of loose black tea to each jar before you fill it up. Again, it's not going to turn your big smushy cucumbers into crisp pickles, but if you just want to give yourself a little extra oomph, it's worth a try and isn't going to cost you a lot of time or money.
- Speaker 1: [09:56](#) Now, back in the day and a lot of the old pickle recipes, you'll see that it is recommended to add alum or food-grade lime to help with crispness. Alum is technically aluminum and it's not recommended anymore just because now we know that

aluminum in our food is really bad for us and I don't like using any aluminum in my kitchen, you know, aluminum dishes or pans. I just always avoid it, so I'm really not going to add it into my pickles. Therefore, I have no personal data to share with you in the interest of adding alum, but I'm pretty sure if you use the tips above the five little tips I just shared, you're probably not going to even need to consider alum or lime. So just skip those. All right, so let's say you use every single trick I just told you and you still get mushy pickles because here's the deal.

Speaker 1: [10:56](#)

Mushiness happens sometimes, even if you are doing everything in your power to prevent it. The good news is mushy pickles are still very edible and often if I have bigger cucumbers that I've canned just because they are literally drowning me out of my kitchen and I have to do something with them and I know they're going to be mushy. I use those ones for just chopping up to add to potato salad or relish or whatever, and I keep the smaller crispier ones for just eating out of the jar. So just keep experimenting. Even if you have some mushy pickle instances, you're going to get into that groove eventually and figure out what works best for you. To wrap it up, as silly as it may seem to care about pickles and how to make them crispy, these of little tricks and kitchen knowhow are the things we've really lost as we have moved away from growing our own food and making food from scratch. As you commit to learning these things, which don't take a lot of time or a lot of effort, it's not only going to make your homemade food taste better, but it's going to help recapture some of this lost knowledge that you can in turn pass on to your kids or grandkids or anyone that maybe you're mentoring in the art of homestead kitchen.

Speaker 1: [12:33](#)

One of my favorite ways to make pickles or to preserve them is to can them so we can ferment them. We can make refrigerator pickles but canning is my favorite method because it keeps them out of my refrigerator and they will last on the shelf for a very long time. And in case you are wanting to can but you didn't have a mom or grandma to teach you the ropes. I have got you covered. I created a full ebook complete with all the details and diagrams information you need to know to start canning safely and with competence. Go to learnhowtocan.com for all the details and some bonus goodies as well. That's www.learnhowtocan.com and that is it. My friends. Thank you for listening. If you have a minute, I would be so honored if you would just pop over to iTunes and leave a quick review so more people can find this podcast and bring homesteading into their lives. Thanks for listening and I can't wait to catch up with you on the next episode of the old fashioned on purpose podcast.

