



# Troubleshooting Fermented Pickles

Fermented pickling involves curing in a brine solution for one or more weeks. Quick process pickles, or vinegar pickling, are easy to prepare with boiling hot vinegar and seasonings. Both variations of pickling; however, do not come without challenges. Please consider the following when troubleshooting issues with your canned pickle product.

## Problem: White sediment in jar

Cause	Prevention
Bacteria cause this during fermentation	No prevention
Salt contains an anti-caking agent or other additives	Use canning or pickling salt

## Problem: Dark or discolored pickles\*

Cause	Prevention
Minerals in hard water	Use soft water
Ground spices used	Use whole spices
Spices left in jars of pickles	Place spices loosely in cheesecloth bag so they can be removed before canning
Brass, iron copper, or zinc utensils used	Use food-grade un-chipped enamelware, glass, stainless
Iodized salt used	Use canning or pickling salt

\*If brass, copper or zinc utensils and brining equipment were used, DO NOT use pickles



## Problem: Strong, bitter taste

Cause	Prevention
Spices cooked too long in vinegar or too many spices used	Follow directions for amount of spices to use and boiling time
Vinegar too strong	Use vinegar of the proper strength (5% acidity)
Dry weather	No prevention. Bitter taste is usually in the peel or skin of fruits and vegetables
Using salt substitutes	Cannot be prevented due to potassium chloride

## Problem: Shriveled pickles

Cause	Prevention
Placing cucumbers in too strong brine, too heavy syrup or too strong vinegar	Follow tested recipe. Use amounts of salt and sugar called for in a recipe and vinegar with 5% acidity
Long lapse of time between harvest and brining (fermentation only)	Brine or start fermentation within 24 hours after harvesting cucumbers
Overcooking or overprocessing	Follow tested recipe
Dry weather	No prevention. Bitter taste is usually in the peel or skin

### Problem: Soft or slippery pickles\*

Cause	Prevention
Vinegar too weak (pickling only)	Use vinegar of at least 5% acidity
Salt brine too weak during fermentation	Maintain salt concentration specified in recipe
Cucumbers stored at too high a temperature during fermentation	Store fermenting cucumbers between 70 - 75° F, the optimum temperature for growth of organisms necessary for fermentation
Insufficient amount of brine	Keep cucumbers immersed in brine
Pickles not processed properly (to destroy microorganisms)	Process pickles in canner after filling jars
Moldy garlic or spices	Always use fresh spices
Blossom ends not removed from cucumbers	Slice at least 1/16th inch off blossom end of cucumbers

\*If spoilage is evident, do not eat

### Problem: Scum on brine surfaces while curing cucumbers

Cause	Prevention
Wild yeasts and bacteria feed on the acid, reducing the concentration	Remove scum as often as needed.



### Problem: Spotted or dull color

Cause	Prevention
Cucumbers not well cured or brined.	Use brine of proper concentration. Complete fermentation process
Excessive exposure to light	Store processed jars in a dark, dry cool place.
Cucumber of poor quality	Use high quality produce, and grow under proper conditions (i.e. weather, soil)

### Problem: Hollow Pickles (fermentation only)

Cause	Prevention
Cucumbers too large for brining	Use smaller cucumbers
Improper fermentation	Keep brine proper strength and covered. Cure until fermentation is complete
Long lapse of time between harvest and brining	Fermentation process should be started within 24 hours after harvesting
Growth defect of cucumber	No prevention. Remove and use for relishes instead of fermented pickles



This information was adapted from the National Center for Home Food Preservation and University of Georgia. For more information and recipes to follow, go to <http://nchfp.uga.edu>