

Spicy Dill Half-Sours

makes 4 quarts

2 dozen small (4- to 5-inch) pickling cucumbers (about 3 pounds)
4 jalapeño peppers, stemmed & halved
6 ounces fresh dill
8 teaspoons black peppercorns
8 cloves garlic, peeled & halved
4 one-quart plastic soup tubs, lids pierced twice with a small skewer
water
pickling salt

In a large bowl, cover cucumbers with cold water & ice cubes; allow to soak for 2-3 hours. Scrub cucumbers well, remove from water, and cut 1/8 inch off of the blossom ends. Divide cucumbers, jalapeños, dill, peppercorns, & garlic among tubs. Depending on the size & number of your cukes, this may take some clever packing skills.

Make 3.5% brine by stirring 1/4 cup pickling salt into 2 quarts water until clear. Divide brine among tubs, filling right up to the brim. Snap lids onto containers quickly. A little brine should squirt up through the holes and pool in the lids; leave it there. Place tubs in a rimmed baking dish or pan and put the dish in an area of your house that will stay between 70° and 80° F. Put remaining brine in a handy covered container nearby.

After a day or two, the cucumbers will begin to ferment, and brine/gas will be forced up through the holes in the lids of the tubs. You want to keep the cucumbers as completely submerged as possible, so if you notice air pockets under the tub lids, you will need to remove the lids, add more brine, and replace the lids quickly, as before. Also, if a large amount of white or yellow mold starts to cake under any of the lids, you will want to remove the lids, wash off the mold, add more brine, and replace. After four days, you should do this even if there is no mold.

After 6 days, remove one of the cucumbers and taste it. If your fermenting room is on the warm side, the pickles may be sour and ready. I do the fermenting in my kitchen, and in the summer, the temperature in there stays around 76 degrees. My pickles are sour to my satisfaction after 8 days.

Shake the tubs to dislodge the bottom sediment and transfer the ingredients of the tubs to clean jars. Refrigerate for 3 days (and keep refrigerated until they're gone). Pickles are best in the first 2-3 months, but I've eaten them after a year, and they're still pretty good.