

World Tour Fermented Pickles

One brine, one method, four countries



One brine. One method. Four jars that each taste like somewhere else. You pack cucumbers, cover them in a 3% saltwater brine, and let the same simple ferment carry four flavor profiles: Thai, Italian, French, and Spanish. The other thread running through every jar is crunch, and how a little tannin keeps a fermented pickle from going soft on you.

The 3% Brine

Salt is the safety net of a ferment, so this is the one number worth getting right. HWL runs a 3% brine, which means salt equal to 3% of the weight of the water. A kitchen scale makes it exact and repeatable every time. No scale? Start with about 4 to 5 teaspoons of fine sea salt per quart, and know it can drift by salt type, which is exactly why the scale earns its spot on the counter.

Water	Salt at 3%
1 liter (1,000 g)	30 g
1 quart (946 g)	28 g
half gallon (1,893 g)	57 g
1 gallon (3,785 g)	114 g

The easy one to remember: 30 grams of salt per liter of water. Everything else is just that ratio scaled.

Two things that quietly make or break a ferment

Salt: use pure salt with nothing added. Iodized table salt and anti-caking agents can cloud the brine and slow the ferment. Plain kosher or fine sea salt is what you want.

Water: use non-chlorinated water. Chlorine from the tap can stall the bacteria doing the work. Filtered water is fine, or leave tap water out overnight so the chlorine off-gasses.

Cucumbers & Crunch

Start with fresh, firm pickling cucumbers, the short knobby kind (Kirby). The fresher the better. A cucumber that has been sitting in the crisper drawer for a week will ferment soft no matter what you do.

Then trim the blossom end off every cucumber, the end opposite the stem. It holds enzymes that turn pickles to mush. Cutting it off is your first crunch move. The tannin helper below is your second. Together they are why these come out snappy instead of sad.

Crispness Helpers (pick one per jar)

Tannins slow the enzymes that soften cucumbers, so one tannin source per jar keeps things crisp. Pick one:

- 1 to 2 clean grape leaves. The traditional choice, and it adds no flavor of its own.
- 1 clean, unsprayed oak leaf.
- 1 teaspoon loose plain black tea, or 1 plain tea bag.

Keep the tea plain and unflavored, and go light. You want the tannin, not a cup of tea in your brine.

Pack the Jar

Pack the cucumbers in first, then tuck the aromatics and your tannin helper around them. Pour the 3% brine over everything until it is fully covered. Leave about an inch of room at the top: a ferment bubbles and rises, and that inch keeps it from pushing brine out onto your counter. Add a weight to hold everything under the brine, then fit the airlock lid.

Master list, one quart jar

- Pickling cucumbers, enough to pack the jar snugly
- 3% brine, enough to cover
- 1 glass fermentation weight
- 1 airlock lid
- 1 crispness helper (grape leaf, oak leaf, or black tea)

The Process

- 1 Wash the cucumbers and trim off the blossom ends.
- 2 Prep the aromatics, herbs, and supporting vegetables for the jar you are building.
- 3 Add the tannin helper to the jar first, or tuck it along the side.
- 4 Pack in the cucumbers, then work the supporting ingredients throughout the jar.
- 5 Pour over the 3% brine until everything is covered, leaving an inch of headspace.
- 6 Add a weight and make sure every solid piece sits below the brine.
- 7 Fit the airlock lid and set the jar out of direct sun to ferment.

Time, Temperature & Doneness

Ferment at room temperature, ideally 65 to 72°F, out of direct sunlight. Warmer rooms move faster, cooler rooms slower. Start tasting around day 3. Most jars land where you want them somewhere between day 5 and day 10.

Done is a taste call: pleasantly sour and still crisp. The brine will turn cloudy and the cucumbers will fade from bright green to a duller olive. Both are normal, and both mean it is working.

After It's Ready

Once a jar tastes right, swap the airlock for a solid lid and move it to the fridge. The cold slows the ferment to a crawl and holds the flavor. Refrigerated, these keep for several months, though in my house they never last that long.

Is it working, or is it off?

Normal and fine: cloudy brine, sediment at the bottom, steady bubbling, a sour pickle smell, and sometimes a thin white film on top. That film is kahm yeast. It is harmless, just skim it off.

Toss the jar if: you see fuzzy mold in any color, the smell is rotten rather than sour, or the pickles turn slimy. Off truly reads as off. When in doubt, throw it out.

The Four Jars

Same brine, same steps. The only thing that changes is what you tuck in around the cucumbers.

1 • Asian / Thai-ish

Chiles, shallot, ginger, and Thai basil

- Pickling cucumbers to pack the jar
- 1 small handful carrot sticks or daikon/radish slices
- 2 to 4 thin slices shallot or red onion
- 3 to 5 garlic cloves, lightly crushed
- 6 to 8 thin slices fresh ginger
- 1 small bunch Thai basil, leaves and tender stems, lightly bruised
- 2 to 6 dried Asian chiles (optional, for heat)
- 1 crispness helper + 3% brine to cover

Note: The Thai basil is what makes this read as Thai, so keep it. The chiles can come out entirely for a mild jar.

2 • Italian

Garlic, sweet pepper, and a savory herb bundle

- Pickling cucumbers to pack the jar
- 1 small handful sweet pepper strips
- 2 to 4 thin onion slices (optional)
- 3 to 5 garlic cloves, lightly crushed
- 2 to 3 sprigs fresh oregano
- 1 to 2 basil stems plus a few small leaves
- 2 to 3 sprigs fresh thyme
- Small piece of rosemary (optional, light)
- 1 to 2 tsp whole black peppercorns
- Pinch red pepper flakes (optional)
- 1 crispness helper + 3% brine to cover

Note: Go light on the rosemary so it does not take over. Right at home on a charcuterie or antipasto board.

3 • French

Tarragon, thyme, shallot, bay: gentle and herb-driven

- Pickling cucumbers to pack the jar
- 2 to 4 slices shallot or mild onion
- 2 to 4 garlic cloves, to taste
- 2 to 3 sprigs fresh tarragon
- 2 to 3 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 to 2 tsp whole black peppercorns
- Crispness helper: 1 tsp loose plain black tea or 1 tea bag
- 3% brine to cover

Note: If you want to try black tea as your tannin helper, this is the jar for it. The herbs are gentle enough that the tannin sits quietly behind them without turning the brine into tea.

4 • Spanish

Garlic, onion, sweet pepper, bay, and smoked paprika

- Pickling cucumbers to pack the jar
- 1 small handful sweet pepper strips
- 2 to 4 onion slices
- 3 to 5 garlic cloves, lightly crushed
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 to 2 tsp whole black peppercorns
- 1/2 to 1 tsp smoked paprika in a small sachet, or paprika threads
- 1 to 2 dried chiles (optional, for heat)
- 1 crispness helper + 3% brine to cover

Note: Loose paprika will cloud the jar, so tie it into a small spice sachet or a tea filter. Good next to grilled meat, beans, or a hearty salad.

Your Kit

- Silicone airlock lids for wide-mouth jars
- Quart fermentation jars
- Glass fermentation weights
- Plain loose-leaf black tea (for the tannin option)