

Power to the Pickle

Dan Rosenberg, of Montague, stumbled onto pickling as an outgrowth of his interest in sustainable agriculture.

“In college, I had a lot of interest in environmental issues and ended up focusing on organic agriculture,” Rosenberg says. Once out of college, he apprenticed at an organic vegetable farm. In 1999, Rosenberg attended a workshop at a Northeast Organic Farming Association conference and began pickling as a way to keep eating local year round.

Around this time, he also grew interested in the work of Weston Price, a dentist and researcher who studied the diets of indigenous peoples worldwide during the 1920s and 1930s. Price found that people eating traditional diets—which often included raw, naturally fermented pickles—enjoyed dramatically better health than people eating the “modern” diet of the industrialized world.

Rosenberg started his business, Real Pickles, in 2002. “There are countless societal and ecological benefits to having our food systems locally or regionally oriented,” says Rosenberg. “For me, the business is a way I can make a small contribution to bringing that about.”

He buys all his produce from organic farms in the Northeast and as locally as possible. His interest in Price’s work led him to settle on using natural fermentation, the oldest method of pickling. According to Rosenberg, this fermentation process relies only on the lactic acid cultures that naturally occur on the vegetables and a small amount of sea salt.

“Very few businesses in the country use this fermentation process anymore. But for thousands of years this was how people all over the world did pickles,” says Rosenberg.

The result is a cucumber pickle with a sharp, fresh flavor and a slightly soft texture.

In 2005, Dan’s partner, Addie Rose Holland, joined him in running Real Pickles. Today, in addition to cucumber dill pickles, the pair makes naturally fermented sauerkraut, red sauerkraut, kimchi (Korean-style pickled cabbage in this case), and ginger carrots year round at the Western Mass Food Processing Center in Greenfield.

The cucumbers, which ferment for about five days, account for the busiest season during their harvest months of July, August and September. Cabbages are harvested, shredded and set up in barrels for fermentation between September and December. The kimchi ferments for a month or two and is packaged in late fall and early winter, and the sauerkraut and ginger carrots ferment anywhere from two to six months and are packaged over the course of the winter and spring.

Real Pickles are only sold in the Northeast to cut down on fossil fuels consumed for delivery.

“We don’t ship all over the country,” says Rosenberg. “There aren’t a lot of products like ours available, so we

hear from people out of state who really want our stuff. But we feel that this is a way we can act as something of an example.” ♦

Genevieve Rajewski frequently writes about food and wine—or better yet, all manners of snacking and sipping. Her publication credits include Washington Post Magazine, The Boston Globe, The Christian Science Monitor, Cooking Light, Imbibe and The Boston Phoenix, among many others. Read more at www.ticktockwordshop.com.



MAKE YOUR OWN PICKLES

Lorne Jones, of Root Cellar Preserves, generously shared his mother’s favorite recipe for dill pickles. This simple recipe requires no canning; however, the pickles must always remain refrigerated.

Ginny Jones’ Home-Style Dill Pickles

To each quart jar add:

- 2 to 3 cloves of garlic
- 1 small red or green hot pepper (optional)
- 1 generous sprig of dill

Select fresh, firm pickling cucumbers. Wash and cut off both ends, then pack in jars.

Bring to a boil:

- 1 quart distilled or cider vinegar
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of Kosher salt

Pour liquid into jars and seal. (The heat dissolves the salt in the vinegar and marries the flavors and also helps the brine permeate the pickles.) Refrigerate the pickles, which will be ready to eat in about a week.