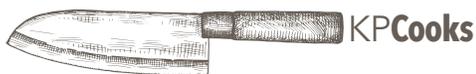


The Ever-Exultant Watermelon Pickle



by Barbara Van Bogart
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At a recent summer picnic, a friend and I were talking about all things food. He asked if I knew watermelon pickles were a real “thing.” Indeed, they are. While most of us relish the sweet red watermelon meat as a summertime treat, generations past didn’t waste much of this fruit, using the white rind to make delicious pickles.

Watermelon is said to have originated in northeastern Africa over 4,000 years ago, where it was domesticated for both food and water. Over the next 2,000 years, it migrated to Mediterranean lands. Historians tell us it was brought to America by some of the earliest European colonists sometime in the early 1600s. Mark Twain once said to taste a watermelon was “to know what the angels eat,” and most people would wholeheartedly agree. The first cookbook published in the United States in 1796, “American Cookery” by Amelia Simmons, contained a recipe for watermelon rind pickles.

While watermelon used to be available only in the summertime, now it is widely sold throughout the year. There are over 1,200 varieties grown in 96 countries. Seedless watermelons were developed about 50 years ago, thus making watermelon seed spitting contests (also a “thing” years ago) a little more difficult to conduct. Seeded or seedless, mini (the personal size, smaller watermelons) or yellow and orange (lacking lycopene which gives red watermelon its deep color), this age-old fruit is indeed a treat for the senses.

While watermelon pickles haven’t been seen in grocery stores in recent years, they are easy to make and offer yet another taste treat for a buffet table, alongside your favorite sandwich or all by themselves.

The next time you are cubing watermelon for a salad or making melon balls, save the rind to make these pickles. If properly processed in a water bath, these pickles will keep for several months in the pantry.

Old Fashioned Watermelon Pickles

(adapted from “The Spruce Eats”)

Prep time 25 minutes

Soak time 8 hours

Cook 55 minutes

Total time 9+ hours

2 pounds watermelon rind

¼ cup pickling salt

4 cups water, divided

2 cups granulated sugar

1 cup white vinegar

1 tablespoon cinnamon stick, broken up

1½ teaspoons whole cloves

½ lemon, thinly sliced

5 maraschino cherries, halved (optional)

Trim the dark green and pink parts from the watermelon rind and discard. Cut the rind into 1-inch cubes and measure out seven cups.

Put the rinds in a large container with the pickling salt and 3 cups of the water. Add more water to cover the rinds, if necessary. Soak overnight. Drain and rinse watermelon rind in the morning.

Cover the rinds with cold water in a large saucepan. Simmer about 10 minutes until just tender.

Meanwhile, in a nonreactive 6-to-8-quart kettle or Dutch oven, combine the sugar, vinegar, cinnamon, whole cloves and remaining 1 cup water. Simmer the mixture for 10 minutes.

Add the drained rinds, lemon slices and maraschino cherries (if using) to the spiced syrup you’ve just made. Simmer the mixture until the watermelon rinds are translucent, about 30 minutes.

Fill sterilized half-pint jars with the hot watermelon rind and syrup mixture, leaving ½ inch of head space. Add the rings and lids, then process in a boiling water bath for five minutes. Remove jars, letting cool on a rack.

Serve and enjoy!