

Pickled Peaches: Improved Process for Entrepreneurs and Home Orchardists

Food Processing for Entrepreneurs Series

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Information in this NebGuide may be valuable to U.S. entrepreneurs and small peach growers; it was developed as international research to aid peach growers in less-developed regions.

Peach growers often lack sufficient markets for undersize peaches. Undersize fruit is usually more labor intensive for entrepreneurs or processors lacking sophisticated processing equipment. However, much undersized fruit from peach-packing operations is suitable for pickling, especially during early and midseason when varieties are mainly of the semi-cling type. Such fruit may be low in solids and flavor, but high-quality pickled peaches can be made by correct use of vinegar, sugar, spices and the improved process presented here.

The traditional home method for pickling peaches used an overnight soak in the pickling syrup to equalize the solution throughout the peach. This reduced shrinkage and improved the flavor of the finished product. Overnight soaking periods are impractical for commercial production. Instead rapid cold pack methods have been used, but these methods result in excess syrup in proportion to fruit, and often in lower quality flavor and texture (See *Table I*).

Table I. Fruit-syrup ratios*

Method	Pack: (28-ounce jar)		Cut-out syrup volume Oz.
	Fruits No.	Syrup Oz.	
Cold pack	8	13	14
Preheat	11	9	9

*1 3/4 to 2-inch diameter clingstone peaches, 61.5 percent syrup (61.5° Brix).

The improved process uses many commercial production principles in a process optimized for quality and simple production that doesn't require sophisticated equipment. The process produces pickled peaches of excellent flavor, good texture and color, and with a higher ratio of fruit to syrup than those processed by customary methods. The process, desirable for commercial production, also is applicable for home use. This improved process uses a short preheating treatment of the fruit in the pickling syrup. Preheated fruits can be packed closer, thus increasing the fruit to syrup ratio. Correct preheating did not soften the fruit enough to cause tearing or tissue collapse during packing as often occurs with hot holding methods. Final cooking of the fruit was done in the container after spices and syrup were added and the container was exhausted and sealed. Cooking periods required for proper texture varied with other treatments as given in *Table II*.

Table II. Required cooking times¹

Method	Cooking Time ² Minutes
Cold packed fruit	
8 minutes steam exhaust	30
Vacuum seal	35
10 minutes preheat	
4 minutes steam exhaust	20
Vacuum seal	25
15 minutes preheat	
4 minutes steam exhaust	13
Vacuum seal	18

¹Firm, ripe clingstone fruit, 1 3/4 to 2 inches packed in 28 oz. jars.

²Cooking times may vary slightly with variety, fruit size, maturity or size of container.

Flavor qualities were affected greatly by the syrup formula used. Best results with the preheating method were obtained by using a syrup with 1 part acid to 40 parts sugar, and 61.5

percent soluble solids (percent sugar by weight). The kind and quantity of spices used also affected the flavor. Excellent flavor was obtained from the spicing treatment in the improved process as described below.

Improved Process

1. Use firm, ripe fruit of a variety suitable for pickling — 1 3/4 to 2 inches in diameter preferred.
2. Prepare syrup by dissolving 13 lb., 3 oz. sugar in 1 gallon of 40-grain vinegar.
3. Peel peaches with a knife or dip for 1 minute in a hot lye solution; wash and trim.
4. Preheat fruit 10 minutes in vinegar-sugar syrup at simmering temperature (200° to 205°F).
5. Add spices to containers: 1/4 teaspoon of mixed pickling spices, 2 cloves, and 1 small piece of stick cinnamon per 28 oz. jar. Vary to suit taste.
6. Add prepared fruit, cover with hot syrup, steam exhaust 4 minutes, seal, cook 28 oz. jar at 212°F for 20 minutes, cool in air. If a vacuum sealer is used cook 25 minutes. If a 32 oz. mason-type jar is used cook for 25 minutes.
7. Product may be used after aging one week; however for maximum quality six weeks are required.