



Yes We Can Can

By APRIL MCGREGER

IT'S NOT just Grandma's Ball jar anymore. A whole new generation is turning to canning and preserving both as a technique for making eating locally a year-round experience, and also simply as a means of creative expression. A couple of young North Carolina women have also made home canning an aspect of their livelihoods.

Western North Carolina mountain resident Ashley English, who told us just about everything we needed to know about the urban chicken in *Coop De Ville* (page 32), is the architect of a new series from Lark Books called *Homemade Living*. In addition to her *Keeping Chickens*, Ashley has books on dairy and beekeeping coming up this spring. And she is the author of the delightfully accessible *Canning and Preserving: All You Need to Know to Make Jams, Jellies, Pickles, Chutneys & More*. It really is all that, but if you like to get your info from the Internet, Ashley recommends some sites, including the comprehensive www.canningusa.com.

Over on the other side of the Tarheel state, in Carrboro, April McGreger has established Farmer's Daughter Brand, selling freshly baked pastries, jams, preserves, chutney and artisan pickles at specialty stores and local farmers markets, from whence she gets most of her raw materials. For those of us who can't get to the Carrboro Farmer's Market some fall Saturday, April has graciously offered to share some of her best green tomato recipes here. [CLICK HERE](#) for more information on the McGreger operations. —EDITOR

This is a favorite with a loyal following. It is a shining addition to country ham or any cured meat, roasted poultry and pork, and makes for a stellar grilled ham and cheese sandwich. It is also a lovely accompaniment to farmstead cheeses, particularly those with a bit of sharpness and an enticing barnyard-y aroma. My favorite is a washed rind, Belgian style Jersey cow's milk cheese called Hickory Grove made by Chapel Hill Creamery in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, [WEBSITE](#). This chutney is a great way to use up those end-of-summer tomatoes hanging on the vine, refusing to ripen. The aroma of

sweet spices and warm vinegar simmering on the stove is my harbinger of fall.

GREEN TOMATO CHUTNEY - Makes 2 ½ Pints

- 2 cups apple cider vinegar
- 2 cups light brown sugar
- 3-inch piece of ginger, peeled and sliced thin
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 4 whole allspice berries
- 5 whole cloves
- 1 ½ pounds green tomatoes, with no trace of pink, cored and cut into ½" pieces
- 1 large yellow onion, peeled and diced
- 1 tablespoon fine sea salt
- A pinch dried red chile flakes
- 1 ½ cups black currants (or substitute raisins)
- 1 tablespoon yellow mustard seed
- ½ teaspoon celery seed

Put the vinegar and sugar in a large, nonreactive saucepan. Bring to boil over high heat, stirring until sugar dissolves. Reduce heat to a steady simmer and cook for 10 minutes.

In a piece of cheesecloth, wrap up the sliced ginger, cinnamon stick, allspice berries and cloves, and secure with kitchen twine. Throw in the simmering vinegar syrup.

Add the green tomatoes, onion, salt, chile flakes, currants, mustard seed and celery seed to the vinegar mixture and simmer, stirring often, until the tomatoes are tender and the chutney is thick and glossy, about 45 minutes. Remove the spice sachet.

Ladle into clean half-pint jars with two-piece lids and process in a boiling water bath for 5 minutes for long keeping, or simply put in sterilized jars and refrigerate for up to 1 month. Note: If you live at a higher altitude, you will need to add 1 minute to the processing time for each foot over 1,000 feet. For example, at Santa Fe's 7,000-foot altitude, we would need to keep the jars in the boiling water bath for 11 to 12 minutes.

Photograph by APRIL MCGREGER

Traditional cultures all over the world preserve much of the food needed for the winter through lactic-acid fermentation. Sauerkraut, kimchi, grape leaves, cucumbers, turnips, green tomatoes, peppers, corn and many, many more vegetables were commonly preserved through this process. Of all methods of preserving, lacto-fermentation is the most magical. At its simplest, it is just vegetables and salt. This provides the right conditions for nature to take its course. The salt slows the decomposition of the vegetables briefly until the sugars in the vegetables are broken down by friendly lactobacilli and converted into lactic acid to preserve the vegetables for many months.

The recipe below is a dill green-tomato pickle with an addition of pickling spices, which gives it an appealing old-fashioned flavor. The pickles are wonderful on their own as a snack, with burgers or sandwiches, or on a meat and cheese platter. You can even get a little crazy and have them battered and fried. You'll experience the perfect marriage of two Southern favorites: fried green tomatoes and fried dill pickles.

LACTO-FERMENTED SPICY GREEN TOMATO PICKLES - Makes 2 quarts

- 2 quarts quartered green tomatoes, with no trace of pink (those will be mushy)
- 5 cloves garlic, smashed
 - A large handful dill (preferably dill heads or flowering dill, but fronds only will suffice. You may substitute 1 teaspoon of dried dill weed.)
- 1 heaping tablespoon pickling spice
- 5 dried chiles de arbol or more (or substitute any fresh hot pepper)
- 1 quart of filtered water
- 3 tablespoons fine sea salt
 - For crunchier pickles, add a few grape or sour cherry leaves

NECESSARY EQUIPMENT

- 1-gallon stoneware crock, OR a food grade plastic bucket, or other nonreactive container to hold your pickles, such as a large glass jar
- Measuring cup and measuring spoons
- Plate that will fit snugly inside the rim of your container, or two plastic Ziploc bags large enough to cover the surface of your pickling crock.

INSTRUCTIONS

In a clean crock or other pickling vessel, layer well-washed vegetables and spices. Leave about 4 inches at the top of crock. Prepare brine with cold, filtered water. Whisk well to completely dissolve the salt and pour the brine over vegetables. The brine should just cover vegetables.

Next, you need to weigh down vegetables to keep them fully submerged in the brine. You can do this by using a plate that just fits inside the crock, thus creating a seal, and weighting it with a well-scrubbed, large rock or several quart jars that have been filled with water and covered so that the water does not spill. Cover all of that with a clean dishtowel or cheesecloth.

Alternately, you can use a plastic bag filled with brine to act as both a weight and a seal. I often use this method. Fit a heavy 1-gallon plastic freezer bag inside another (for larger than 2-gallon crocks, I use the 2-gallon bags). Fill the inner bag with a salt brine of 3 tablespoons salt to 1 quart of water and tightly close both bags to prevent leaks. Place on top of the pickles, making sure it fits tightly around the inner edge of the crock. It acts as an airtight weight on top of the vegetables, which will discourage the growth of yeast and scum. Store the crock in a cool place (60° to 75°F). Liquid may bubble and seep from the pickles as they ferment, so place the crock on a tray to contain any overflow.

Check the pickles every day and skim off any scum, yeast, or mold that forms. At temperatures above 70°F, yeast and mold are more aggressive, so fermenting in a cooler environment requires less maintenance.

The pickles will take about 4-10 days to complete fermentation, depending on the temperature—cooler temperatures slow fermentation. You will know that fermentation is complete when bubbles are no longer rising to the surface of the pickles and they have a fresh, tart smell. Taste the brine. If the saltiness is not balanced with sourness, you can let the pickles continue to ferment another day or two. Store the finished pickles in the refrigerator, where they will keep for up to a year as long as you keep them under brine. If you fermented in a large stoneware crock, you may transfer the pickles to sterilized pint jars for storage. You may also process the pickles in a water bath for shelf storage, but you will kill the beneficial bacteria and probiotics that make the pickles so healthful. 