

FRUIT

Spiced Crabapples

Small apples stay whole, with their stems and glossy skins, scented with cinnamon, cloves and fresh ginger. Sweet, tangy and full of flavour, they are a lovely addition to an autumn table.

Recipe author: National Center for Home Food Preservation · University of Georgia



Recipe ingredient: crabapples.

TIME

Two days, including an overnight soak + 12-24 hours for the jars to cool

YIELD

About 9 US pint jars (473 ml each)

Method: Pickling in 5% acidity apple cider vinegar + boiling-water canning

Season: Late summer and autumn, depending on the variety

Storage: Store correctly processed, sealed jars in a cool, dark, dry place, ideally at 10-21°C. Use within a year for best quality. Once opened, refrigerate at no more than 4°C and use clean utensils. The recipe source gives no separate storage period after opening. If you discover a failed seal within 24 hours of correctly processing the jars, refrigerate and use within a week. Never taste food from a jar with a lost seal, mould, leaks, a bulging lid or any other signs of spoilage.

Ingredients

- 5 lb small, firm crabapples (about 2.27 kg)
- 4½ US cups apple cider vinegar labelled 5% acidity (about 1.065 litres)
- 3¾ US cups drinking water (about 887 ml)
- 7½ US cups white granulated sugar (about 1.5 kg); the original measurement is by volume
- 4 US teaspoons whole cloves (about 20 ml)
- 4 cinnamon sticks
- 6 cubes of fresh ginger, each ½ inch (about 1.3 cm) on each side

Equipment

- About 9 Mason canning jars, US pint size (473 ml), with two-piece metal lids
- A water-bath canner fitted with a rack
- A clean, food-safe container holding 1-2 US gallons (about 3.8-7.6 litres)

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Sources and history on the Fermentarnia website
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- A spice bag or cheesecloth, a sieve or blanching basket, and a toothpick

Preparation

1. Prepare the water-bath canner

Heat the water in a covered canner fitted with a rack to about 82°C. Use Mason canning jars of the specified size with two-piece metal lids. Wash the jars and keep them hot. Prepare the lids according to the manufacturer's directions. For a recipe that requires overnight soaking, prepare the canner and jars on the day you fill them.

2. Choose suitable fruit

Use firm, sound, correctly identified edible fruit from the genus *Malus*. Do not pick from an unidentified tree or one with an unknown spraying history. Discard mouldy, rotten or badly damaged fruit.

3. Prepare the crabapples

Remove any remains of the blossoms and wash the apples, leaving the stems attached. Prick each apple four times with a toothpick.

4. Bring the syrup to the boil

Combine the vinegar, water and sugar in a large saucepan and bring to the boil. Tie the cloves, cinnamon and ginger in a spice bag or cheesecloth and add to the syrup.

5. Heat the fruit in batches

Divide the crabapples into three batches. Using a sieve or blanching basket, immerse each batch in the boiling syrup for exactly 2 minutes.

6. Leave overnight

Transfer the heated fruit and spice bag to a clean container. Pour over the hot syrup, cover and leave overnight.

7. Reboil the syrup

The next day, remove the spice bag. Drain the syrup into a large saucepan and bring to a full boil.

8. Fill the jars

Pack the crabapples into hot US pint jars and add the boiling syrup. Leave ½ inch (about 1.3 cm) headspace. Clean the rims and fit the lids according to the manufacturer's directions.

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9. Process in boiling water

Place the jars upright on the rack in the preheated canner. The water must cover the lids by at least 2.5 cm (1 inch), or at least 5 cm (2 inches) if processing takes more than 30 minutes. Cover and bring to a full rolling boil. Start timing only once the water is boiling: 20 minutes at elevations up to 304.8 m (1,000 ft); 25 minutes above 304.8 m and up to 914.4 m (3,000 ft); 30 minutes above 914.4 m and up to 1,828.8 m (6,000 ft); 35 minutes above 1,828.8 m. Keep the water boiling throughout. If boiling stops, bring the water back to a full boil and restart the entire processing time.

10. Cool and check the seals

Turn off the heat, remove the canner lid and wait 5 minutes. Lift the jars out upright. Leave them undisturbed for 12-24 hours. Do not press down on the lids or retighten the bands. Check the seals, remove the bands, then wash and dry the jars and label them with the date.

Tips

This is vinegar pickling, not fermentation. Do not replace the specified 5% acidity vinegar with homemade vinegar, kombucha or vinegar of unknown acidity. Keep the ingredient proportions, jar size, headspace and full processing time unchanged.

One US cup is 236.6 ml; one US pint is 473.2 ml; one US half-pint is 236.6 ml. Gram equivalents for ingredients measured by volume are approximate. Use the original volume measures when following this recipe. Do not apply these processing times to larger jars.

A home-canning processing time does not validate commercial production. Changes to batch size, packaging or ingredients require assessment of the process and shelf life of the specific product.

Use only correctly identified, edible *Malus* fruit with a known growing and spraying history. Do not eat the stems, cores or seeds.

Allergens: check the apple cider vinegar label for SULPHITES and the spice specifications for possible cross-contact with allergens.

How to serve

Serve one or two crabapples with roast duck, pork or pâté, alongside mature cheese on a cheese board, or finely chopped in a sauce for cold meats. The stem makes the apple easy to serve, but do not eat the hard core or seeds.

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About the ingredient

One name, many different fruits

“Crabapple” does not refer to a single variety. The University of Minnesota describes a wide range of *Malus* varieties, with fruit from about 6 mm to 5 cm across and ripening dates between July and November. In the kitchen, recording the variety or supplier, harvest date and fruit size is useful: the same process may produce a different texture or colour.

History on the plate

A short history: a record from 1840

The University of Iowa Libraries’ Szathmáry Culinary Manuscripts catalogue includes an anonymous New Hampshire cookbook from 1840. Its list of recipes includes “Spiced Crab Apples”. This is a documented reference to the dish, rather than evidence of when it was invented or a source for modern food-safety procedures.

Under the microscope

What science tells us

Han et al. (2019) studied crabapple fruit extracts and reported a wide range of polyphenol contents: 4.46-46.63 mg GAE/g dry matter. These are laboratory results for extracts and in vitro tests. They do not demonstrate medicinal effects, measure the finished pickle or justify a fixed label claim. The practical conclusion for a small producer is modest: document the variety, ripeness and process, and do not claim a concentration in the finished product without testing it. A vinegar-pickled, heat-treated product should not be described as probiotic.

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