

# Colorado State University Extension

## Food Safety Champion



### Joe Martinez

“Home canning can be a long, exacting process, but it’s worth it and it’s fun!”

Joe Martinez has nothing against your grandma. The Extension Master Food Safety Adviser, whose kitchen is filled with gleaming jars of pickles, says he follows only up-to-date recipes. And he advises others to do the same, no matter how good their grandma’s pickle recipe seems.

Martinez began canning fruit and pickles about 20 years ago when he wanted to reduce the amount of sugar in his diet because of type 2 diabetes. He took courses through CSU Extension-Pueblo

County and became an adviser two years ago. As such, he answers questions when people call the extension with problems. “I walk them through the process, tell them what to do if their pickles are cloudy, help them find good recipes,” he says. “Some of Grandma’s recipes aren’t safe to can. We want to make sure that people are safe; we don’t need 40 people getting sick from home canned beets or beans. In January when I want pickle slices on my hamburger, I know they are good.” He also can rest assured that the Christmas gifts he gives — jam, jelly, pickles — are high-quality and safe as well as tasty.

Martinez, a retired engineer for Marriott Hotels, says cleanliness is most important in home canning. His attention to this detail is obvious in the spotless kitchen of the Minnequa-area home he shares with his wife, Lynn. “Make sure that everything is washed and sterilized,” he says. Other tips: “Always use distilled water. You never want to use regular water because it has minerals in it. Use pickling cucumbers that are dark green and knobby on the outside. Cut off only the blossom end because that’s where the enzymes are that destroy the pickles; the enzymes cause the cucumber to keep ripening and it will get mushy.”

Joe fills a large kettle and has cucumbers washed and ready for a demonstration on making fermented dills. First he places dill seeds and desired spices in the bottom of a well washed, large, crock-type glass jar. He slices off the ends of the cucumbers and packs them into the jar until it’s about three-fourths full, then fills the jar with brine made from water, vinegar, and canning and pickling salt. He lays a food-safe plastic bag on top of the cucumbers, puts a weight inside the bag, closes the bag and tops the jar with its lid. The weighted plastic bag will keep the cucumbers immersed in the brine during the fermentation period, which is necessary to keep them from spoiling. After four weeks, Martinez will pack the cucumbers into sterilized canning jars, heat the brine and pour it over the cucumbers, seal the jars and water bath them at a set temperature. He expects this batch to yield 6 to 8 quarts of pickles. “With this process, you want to get cucumbers that will look good in the jar,” he says. “The others can be used for pickle slices or relish. The good thing is that everybody gets them for Christmas presents.” Sauerkraut can be made using the same fermentation process.

Martinez, who’s also adept at drying foods, recommends these four books for home canning:

The USDA’s “Complete Guide to Home Canning.”

“Ball Complete Book of Home Preserving: 400 Delicious and Creative Recipes for Today,” published by Robert Rose.

“Ball Blue Book Guide to Preserving,” 100th anniversary edition, 1909-2009.

“So Easy to Preserve,” fifth edition, Cooperative Extension University of Georgia, 2006.