

Jewish Pickling: Preservation of Jewish Food and Cultures

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SUMMARY: In this session, you will make and eat pickled foods as we learn about different Jewish cultures around the world and how they used fermentation to survive and thrive.

GOALS: Participants will gain greater understanding into the geographic diversity of Jewish culture. Participants will feel connected to Jewish people around the world. Participants will learn how to make pickles

AUDIENCE: All ages (but more staff needed for younger campers), this is best done with about 20-30 participants, or no more than about 4-5 participants at a station at a time.

TIMING: 75 minutes

MATERIALS:

- Assorted vegetables (carrots, celery, cabbage, onion, cucumbers, garlic)
- Assorted spices (pickling spice, chili flakes, mustard seed, dill seed, cumin seed, zaatar)
- Plain whole milk Greek yogurt
- Salt
- Vinegar (apple cider or white vinegar)
- Sugar or honey
- Cheese cloth
- Cups or bowls for eating
- Large glass jars with tight lids (if slow pickling)
- Markers
- Pots
- Burners
- Spoons
- Oven mitts or towels for handling hot foods
- Cutting board
- knife
- Copies of a world map (or at least Europe, Asia, Africa, included in [appendix](#))
- Folders or binder rings (optional)
- Copies of recipe pages and facts (included in [appendix](#))
- Playlist of Jewish world music and a speaker
- Jar of kosher dill pickles

SET-UP: This program is best run in a room with a kitchen or an area near a kitchen. Some of these recipes can be prepped in advance. Set up 4-6 tables (1 for each station) and prep each station according to its recipe needs (pot and burner, cutting board, jars, etc.).

Set up the space so that different pickled foods are placed roughly in relationship to each other as they would be on a map. At each station, have the following:

- A world map available with the featured country or region circled or marked in some way (appendix)
- A finished version of the fermented food, available for tasting and eating.
- Ingredients and equipment to make some more (for those that can be done quickly)
- A recipe sheet for each food (appendix)
- A few facts about Jews in the region being featured at that station (appendix)
- Conversation prompts (appendix)

SESSION TIMELINE

- 00:00-00:20 – *Welcome and Intro to Jewish Pickling*
- 00:20-00:55 – *Fermentation Stations*
- 00:55-01:05 – *Inside Debrief*
- 01:05-01:15 – *Outside Debrief*

SESSION OUTLINE

00:00-00:20 – Welcome and Intro to Jewish Pickling

Invite participants to have a seat in the center of the room (stations around them).

What is Jewish food to you? Ask for examples

What makes these foods “Jewish?”

What parts of the world (if you know) are these foods from?

Explain: Today we are going to learn about Jewish fermented foods.

Pass around dill pickles. When you think of Jewish pickles, this is probably what you think of. These were made popular by Jewish immigrants to North America in the 19th and 20th centuries. (You can learn more at <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/the-nosher/the-official-guide-to-jewish-pickles/>)

Today we'll see that there is so much more.

- What is fermentation, and how does it preserve food? (Share the science of how fermentation “cooks” and preserves food without needing refrigeration)
- Pass around bowls of salt, sugar, vinegar, honey.
- Why might so many Jewish cuisines (and cuisines in general) around the world have fermented or pickled foods?
- What makes Jewish food from a certain region different from other food from that place?

You can share that it often includes influences from other Jewish cultures when there is contact, it considers kosher laws and practices (no meat and milk together), and Shabbat laws and practices (no cooking on Shabbat, so fermented foods are a great Shabbat treat).

00:15-00:55 – Fermentation Stations

Give each participant a folder that includes copies of the world map.

Instructions: At each station, color in the country or region on your map. Take a recipe sheet and add it to your folder or ring. On the recipe sheet, circle one thing you'd like to remember about the food or culture from that place on or near the country on the map.

Enjoy tasting the foods and remember to save some for those who haven't yet arrived at that station.

Let participants know there's a reason there are so many Ashkenazi recipes- ask them to think about why, with the answer given later.

Invite participants to move freely around space. You should always be at a station, but you don't have to go to all of them and can linger as long as you want at any given station.

At each station, first ask participants to mark the location on the map, and to read the information about the included cultures. Then, feel free to sample pickles, and to help make more at each station, following the instructions included.

Note: Try to have a staff member at each table if you can (and minimally at tables that require using heat). Depending on the number of participants, you can have them move freely about and at their own pace or put them in groups with a set amount of time at each station before rotating.

Optional: play music from Jewish communities around the world while everyone is at the stations.

00:55-01:05 – Inside Debrief

- What countries or parts of the world did you visit? *(Note this was not exhaustive- there are many more countries we could have visited!)*
- What is something new you learned or tasted?
- What did you taste that you enjoyed?
- What does all of this tell you about Jewish culture(s)?

Note: there is a lot more Ashkenazi representation here than other cultures. Why? It's not (just) because of Ashkenazi overrepresentation in North American Jewish culture, though that is certainly an issue. Eastern Europe was a much colder climate than many other places Jews lived – the growing season was shorter, so there was less opportunity to eat things fresh. Many more foods had to be preserved in order to be eaten year-round and not spoil as quickly when stored in the colder climate.

01:05-01:15 Outside Debrief

- What did you notice about how the program was set up?
- What worked well? What was more challenging?
- What might you need to change to make this activity work at your camp?
- Highlight the benefit: you can pickle things that you can come back to days or even weeks later. You can explore much more with more time- it's slow food!
- *Note: some of these ingredients were a little more challenging to purchase and store for a conference, but many of these should be readily available or accessible from your camp's kitchen!*

BRINGING IT TO YOUR CAMP

This can be part of a Jewish learning unit or series about world Jewry. Each session could be a different food, rather than having all the foods part of one session.

Additionally, camps have the advantage of being in the same place with the same group of people for a long time, so a group could more easily make the pickled foods and enjoy them several days later together. Fermentation is supposed to be slow and take time!