

Pickling: Preservation of Jewish Food and Culture

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SUMMARY: In this session you will make and eat pickled foods as you learn about the ways different Jewish cultures around the world 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 maple syrup
- Cheese cloth
- Cups or bowls for eating
- Large glass jars with tight lids
- Markers
- Pots
- Burners
- Spoons
- Oven mitts or towels for handling hot foods
- Copies of a world map (or at least Europe, Asia, Africa, included at the end of this document)
- Folders (optional)
- Copies of recipe pages (included at the end of this document)

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 (optional). 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 map world available with the featured country or region circled or marked in some way.
- A finished version of the fermented food, available for tasting and eating.
- Ingredients and equipment to make some more (for those that don't take as long)
- A sheet with instructions for making each food.
- A few facts about Jews in the region being featured at that station



CORNERSTONE 2023 RESOURCE

SESSION TIMELINE

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

SESSION OUTLINE

00:00-00:15 – 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.

- What is fermentation, and how does it preserve food? (Share the science of how [fermentation](#) “cooks” and preserves food without needing refrigeration)
- 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 the map in your folder. Take a recipe sheet to put inside. 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.

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 the space.

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.

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!

World Map:



Pickling: Preservation of Jewish Food and Culture

Recipes and Fun Facts

Note: Many of these recipes involve “quick pickling”- using vinegar so that the foods can be enjoyed that same day, or soon after. In contrast, **lacto-fermentation** relies on salt as the primary driver of fermentation. This process is slower, and usually requires several days or weeks before foods are ready to be enjoyed. Lacto-fermented foods are more shelf-stable and can be preserved and eaten over a longer period of time. Our Jewish ancestors in different parts of the world likely relied on lacto-fermentation a lot more than quick pickling. With more time available during camp, give lacto-fermentation a try!

How do I do it? You can look up recipes online, but it’s also hard to mess pickling up! Just make sure you:

1. Combine a good amount of salt (1-2 tablespoons per large jar) along with water and whatever other spices you plan to use.
2. Make sure veggies are fully submerged in the brine so they aren’t exposed to air (which can spoil them).
3. Find a place where you can store the jars at room temp (too hot or too cold can mess with the fermentation process).

More salt means a slower process, and crunchier, less sour, saltier veggies. Less salt means a quicker process leading to softer, more sour, but less salty veggies. (Think half vs. Full sour pickles.)

Lacto-fermentation: the process of bacteria turning the sugars in vegetables into CO₂ and lactic acid. Lactic acid helps both preserve and make the food more digestible.

Ashkenaz

Zeydi's Magic Pickles by Ozzy Irving Gold-Shapiro

Countries: Germany, France, Poland, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine, Hungary, Romania, etc.

Facts about Ashkenazi Jews

- *Many Jews migrated east to Slavic lands (Poland, Lithuania, Russia, etc) following the crusades in the 11-13th centuries CE.*
- *Hungarian Jews have a custom of decorating their Passover seder tables with gold and silver to represent the precious items Jews asked to take from Egyptians as they fled slavery.*
- *Klezmer (from kley zamir, lit. "vessels of song" or musical instruments) was brought to North America by Ashkenazi immigrants beginning in the late 19th century.*

Recipe:

1. Slice radishes, red onions or any other veggies as thinly as possible.
2. At the bottom of a jar, add:
 - ½ teaspoon mustard seeds
 - ½-1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
 - 3-4 garlic cloves
 - Optional: other spices- coriander seeds, peppercorns, fennel, etc.
3. Pack the jar with the sliced vegetables
4. Combine ¾ cup of vinegar (apple cider vinegar, white vinegar, or a mix of the 2), ¼ cup water, 3 tablespoons maple syrup or sugar, 2 teaspoons of salt in a pot on medium heat.
5. Stir until salt and sugar (if using) are dissolved.
6. Pour the liquid into the jar. Let sit for a few hours at room temp, then store in the fridge.

Iran/Persia

Torshi (Tursi)

Country: Iran (also Iraq)

Facts about Persian Jews

- *Persian Jews have been in existence since the Persian Empire defeated the Babylonian Empire in the 6th century BCE!*
- *Farsi is the most commonly spoken language for Jews currently living in Iran and first-generation Persian Jews who have immigrated elsewhere.*
- *In the US, there are currently approx. 80,000 Persian Jews, with up to 250,000 living in Israel, and up to 30,000 still living in Iran.*
- *Many Persian Jews have a custom of hitting each other with scallions when singing "Dayenu" at the Passover seder.*

Recipe: (adapted from various recipes)

1. Add 5-6 garlic cloves (sliced) to a jar along with salt and other spices (optional, can include chili flakes, black peppercorns, turmeric).
2. In a pot on low heat, combine 2 cups water, ½-1 cup vinegar, 1.5-2 tablespoons kosher salt, and stir until salt is fully dissolved.
3. Combine chopped beets, turnips, or other local veggies in the jar.
4. Fill the jar with brine, and let it cool. Cover and refrigerate, and eat that day, or store in a cool, dark place for a few days before eating.

Note: There is another food called Torshi that also comes from Iran that involves fermenting garlic cloves in red wine vinegar. (That's all you need!) Torshi can be enjoyed in anywhere from several weeks to several years! And many people say the longer you let it sit, the better it will taste. (Source: Nili Simhai)

Sepharad

Pickled Carrots #1

Countries: Spain, Portugal, France, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Italy, Greece, etc.

Facts about Sephardi Jews

- *Sephardi Jew emerged as a group following the Spanish Inquisition in 1492, when Jews in Spain (and in Portugal a few years later), were told to convert, leave, or face death.*
- *Sephardi comes from Sepharad, Hebrew for Spain.*
- *Upon leaving Spain and Portugal, Sephardi Jews ended up in France and other parts of Western Europe (France, North Africa, and many countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea.*
- *There is no one cohesive Sephardi identity or community, as Jews settled in so many different countries and regions after being expelled from Spain.*
- *During the Golden Age of Spain (approx. 900-1200 CE), Jewish life flourished and many important texts were written that we still use today.*

Recipe: (inspired by Ozzy Irving Gold-Shapiro)

1. Chop carrots and pack them into a jar.
2. On the stovetop over low heat, mix water, vinegar, cumin seeds, and red pepper flakes or dried chili. When the salt is dissolved, pour over the carrots until they are submerged.
3. When cool, refrigerate to store.

Ashkenaz

Pickled Carrots #2

Countries: Germany, France, Poland, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine, Hungary, Romania, etc.

Facts about Ashkenazi Jews

- *Ashkenazi Jews made up 33% of the world Jewish population in 1500 CE, 90% right before the Holocaust, and approximately 62% today.*
- *Hasidic Judaism first emerged in 18th century Russia bringing an infusion of mysticism into what many felt were stale and feelings-less Jewish practices.*
- *There is a current revival of Yiddish, a Jewish language written in Hebrew letters, which combines mostly Hebrew and German, with influences from several other languages too! Most Ashkenazi Jews spoke Yiddish before emigrating from Europe.*

Recipe: (inspired by Ozzy Irving Gold-Shapiro)

1. Chop carrots and pack them into a jar.
2. On the stovetop over low heat, mix water, vinegar, dill seeds, and 2 garlic cloves. When the salt is dissolved, pour over the carrots until they are submerged.
3. When cool, refrigerate to store.

Germany

Sauerkraut

Country: Germany (spread to Poland and other Ashkenazi communities too)

Facts about German Jews

- *Ashkenaz refers to the area of Germany (and part of France) from which many Jews migrated east, ending up in Hungary, Poland, Russia, Lithuania, and other parts of Eastern Europe.*
- *In medieval times, Germany (especially Mainz, Speyer, and Worms) was a center for Jewish learning and culture.*

Recipe: (adapted from Adamah)

1. Chop cabbage (and carrots, if you'd like) into small, thin pieces.
2. As you chop, add the cabbage, etc. to a large bowl, and sprinkle with salt each time you add more cabbage to the bowl.
3. Get the water out by pounding the veggies. (You can do this by pushing down repeatedly in the bowl or by putting it in a bag and hitting and smushing it, but the most fun way is to put it in sealed bags in a trash bag and stomping on it!)
4. Pack the cabbage, etc. into a jar, and make sure all of it is submerged by liquid. Optional: add caraway seeds. Weigh it down with larger pieces of cabbage or baggies of brine to keep it submerged.
5. Leave the jars at room temp for approx. 3 days, then open the jars over a sink to release pressure. (Liquid might spill out.) Tighten lids again.
6. When you like the flavor, move it to the fridge to slow the fermentation process, or leave the sauerkraut to keep fermenting. Refrigerate when you like the flavor.

Levant (Historic Land of Israel and surrounding lands)

Labane

Facts about Levant Jews

- *Jews have lived continuously in the Levant (a term referring to the area encompassed by modern Israel-Palestine, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon) since at least the 16th century. (Jews of course also have prior centuries of dwelling and an ancient historical connection to this region.)*
- *Jews living in this area lived under rule of the Ottoman Empire for centuries, followed by the British Empire.*
- *Modern Israeli culture and food includes a wide range of influences, including foods brought by Jews from Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, Morocco, Tunisia, Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Turkey, Ethiopia, as well as food traditions by local Muslim and Arab communities.*

Labane Recipe:

Mix a pinch salt (to taste) into Greek yogurt. Pour the yogurt into cheesecloth and place it over a bowl. Leave for 12-24 hours, depending on desired consistency. (It gets thicker over time). Optional: mix in spices or herbs (zaatar, parsley, dill, etc) and drizzle with olive oil. Enjoy!

Labane shouldn't be confused with **Leben**, another important dairy product of fermented milk, similar to buttermilk

Ashkenaz

Sour Cream

Countries: Germany, France, Poland, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine, Hungary, Romania, etc.

Facts about Ashkenazi Jews

- *Sour cream was an affordable way to get protein for many Ashkenazi Jews who could not afford to eat meat regularly.*
- *Many Ashkenazi Jews in Eastern Europe lived in shtetls (Yiddish for "little city"), small towns where they could live according to Jewish culture and tradition without a lot of outside influence.*
- *Shtetls ranged from a few hundred to a few thousand people, and were often in the countryside, near forests and rivers.*

Recipe

Option 1:

Combine 1 cup of heavy cream with 1 tablespoon of vinegar or lemon juice. Cover loosely *(like with a towel) and let sit for 24 hours.

Option 2:

Combine ingredients above in a jar and cover tightly. Shake it until it thickens and becomes sour cream!

Morocco

Pickles

Facts about Moroccan Jews

- *Moroccan Jews have many different stories of arriving in this community. Some fled during the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions, others arrived after the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, others arrived after the Arab Muslim conquests of North Africa in the 7th and 8th centuries CE. (Judaisms, by Aaron J. Hahn Tapper)*
- *Some Jews arrived in Morocco much more recently, fleeing violence in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries.*
- *Many Moroccan Jews lived in “mellahs” or Jewish quarters, specifically Jewish areas. Still, Jews and Muslims influenced each other’s art, writing, and culture.*

Recipe: (adapted from “Sababa” by Adeena Sussman)

1. Cut lemons into quarters and cut further into thin slices. (Optional: do the same with fennel)
2. Toss with carrots, celery, radishes, and/or any other veggies you’d like.
3. Toss with lemon juice from 1 additional lemon, 2 tablespoons of kosher salt, and 1 tablespoon of sugar.
4. Let sit and toss again when ready to eat. Refrigerate until you’re ready to eat them.

*Fun fact: lemon juice, like vinegar, acts a preservative thanks to its acidity!