

A PECK OF LOCAL PICKLES

BY GENEVIEVE RAJEWSKI

Preserving a Way of Life

Susan and Lorne Jones, of Wellesley, saw in pickling a way to preserve their heritage—both culinary and otherwise.

“We grew up in rural upstate New York with our parents and relatives pickling things,” says Lorne. “In the fall or summer, whatever the harvest was, it went in a jar. So we grew up with that value system.”

However, because of consolidation in the pickling industry, the couple says it’s difficult to find much variety of taste or vegetable in today’s mass-market pickled products. “They all taste the same—the corporate pickle, if you will,” says Susan.

About a year and a half ago, the Joneses decided to try their hand at recapturing the pickles of their past. “We wanted to offer something that was more homemade-tasting and reminiscent of what people’s parents and grandparents used to make,” says Susan.

Both fans of historic homesteads, the couple launched their business, Root Cellar Preserves, with the idea of using a portion of the proceeds to help support historic-preservation projects. “A lot of old houses that represent the making of America are coming down through rural development or because people can’t afford to keep up with the cost of repairs,” explains Lorne.

To date, Root Cellar Preserves has made contributions to the

Draper House, the oldest home in Dover, Massachusetts; the Joneses’ own pet project, an abandoned early American farmstead in Little Falls, New York; and the Dadmun-McNamara House, the work out to small local

businesses. an 1824 colonial homestead in their hometown.

Although the Joneses continually tinker with fine-tuning their preserves at home, they quickly realized that regulations and volume made it unfeasible for them to produce the final products themselves. So the couple decided to contract



Photograph Courtesy of Root Cellar Preserves

Along the way, they realized that such businesses are under as much pressure as the old houses they hoped to save.

Susan says the family-run businesses in Massachusetts that might have been interested in producing for Root Cellar Preserves have all been bought out by large companies. “We’d call pickle companies and get referred back to the same 800-number in Minnesota,” she says. So the Joneses expanded their search and settled on a few small family-owned pickle producers in the Northeast to make several varieties of cucumber pickles. These include a sweet-and-spicy mix of cucumbers, cauliflower, and sweet and hot peppers; a sweet mix of cucumbers, cauliflower, sweet peppers and pearl onions; dill pickles; and sweet pickles with a hint of cinnamon and apple.

“For the most part, they’re recipes we grew up with,” says Lorne. “Although we head to the kitchen after the kids go to bed to experiment.” (However, the Joneses do allow the manufacturers— which handle the fresh-pack processing, including pasteurization—to adjust pH balances at their discretion and make batches in the most-economical quantities.)

Root Cellar Preserves also began carrying a corn relish made by Engel’s Farm and Market in Albany, New York.

“[Ed Engel], the farmer who makes the corn relish, sells it in a little shop. In a couple of months, we sold more of his relish than he does in a whole year, and he was just thrilled. So we are happy to be giving people like him access to bigger city markets,” says Susan.

MAKE YOUR OWN PICKLES

Lorne Jones, of Root Cellar Preserves, generously shared his mother’s favorite recipe for dill pickles. This simple recipe requires no canning; however, the pickles must always remain refrigerated.

Ginny Jones’ Home-Style Dill Pickles

To each quart jar add:

- 2 to 3 cloves of garlic
- 1 small red or green hot pepper (optional)
- 1 generous sprig of dill

Select fresh, firm pickling cucumbers. Wash and cut off both ends, then pack in jars.

Bring to a boil:

- 1 quart distilled or cider vinegar
- ½ cup of Kosher salt

Pour liquid into jars and seal. (The heat dissolves the salt in the vinegar and marries the flavors and also helps the brine permeate the pickles.) Refrigerate the pickles, which will be ready to eat in about a week.