

Homemade Giardiniera – Comfort du Jour

A homemade giardiniera is not only more flavorful, but also far crunchier than the jarred versions. I grew to love this stuff when I worked in a supermarket, as a house-made version of it was always in the prepared foods section of our deli department. It's simple to make, but I suggest you plan ahead because it requires a few days and a decent amount of space in the fridge, at least during preparation. When it is finished, you'll need a tall jar or good-sized container for keeping it, and it will last in the fridge for a few weeks.

One more thing to mention about my variation of giardiniera—it is intended as a riff on the Italian version, not the “Chicago-style,” which is marinated in olive oil rather than pickled.

INGREDIENTS

About 4 cups fresh cauliflower florets

1/2 cup carrot slices

1/2 red or yellow bell pepper, or pepperoncini or cherry peppers

1/2 onion (remember that red onion will make the dish pink!), cut into slices

3 celery heart stalks (strings removed), sliced thickly on the bias

Other vegetables would be good in this as well, provided they are crunchy. If I had made that trip to the store for yellow onions, I would have also picked up a bulb of fennel—that would be fantastic.

1/4 cup kosher salt* (see notes)

*NOTES

I use kosher salt for most of my cooking and especially when brining or pickling. It has a pure salt flavor and the large grains take up more space than regular table salt. The additives in table salt (iodine and anti-caking agents) can add an unpleasant flavor and will likely result in a cloudy liquid. If you only have table salt, it is OK to use it here, but I'd recommend using less of it—maybe 3 tablespoons plus a teaspoon.

INSTRUCTIONS

DAY ONE

Combine all the cut-up vegetables in a large bowl. Pour salt over them and use your hands to toss until evenly salted. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap or a lid and refrigerate several hours, up to overnight.

DAY TWO

Drain the released liquid from the vegetables and rinse well under cold running water for about two minutes. Taste one or two pieces for saltiness. If they are too salty, cover them in the bowl with cold water and let them rest half an hour, then drain and rinse again. When they taste seasoned, but not unpleasantly salty, they are ready for the next step of pickling.

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INGREDIENTS AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR PICKLING

- 1 1/4 cups apple cider vinegar* (filtered, pasteurized recommended)
- 1 1/4 cups water
- 2 tsp. each mustard seeds, coriander seeds, fennel seeds
- 1 tsp. crushed red pepper flakes
- 2 bay leaves
- 3 cloves garlic, peeled and slightly crushed
- 3 Tbsp. cane sugar
- 2 tsp. kosher salt (slightly less if using table salt)

Combine the pickling ingredients in a medium saucepan and bring to a boil. Stir to dissolve the sugar and salt, then remove from heat. Pour the pickling liquid over the vegetables in a clean bowl and press the veggies under the surface of the liquid as much as possible. If it seems there is not enough liquid to go around, add equal splashes of vinegar and water to ensure good coverage.

Cover the bowl with plastic or a lid. Allow the giardiniera to cool, then refrigerate it at least overnight before enjoying it. For longer storage in the fridge, I transfer the giardiniera to a tall jar, and pour the pickling liquid through a mesh strainer to catch the seed spices and bay leaf.