

Chutneys and Relishes

Introduction

Chutneys and relishes are made from a combination of fruit and vegetables with vinegar, sugar, spices and salt. They are an excellent way of using up a glut of fruit and vegetables, particularly as the flavour improves with storage. They should be left to mature in a cool, dark place for approximately one month before consumption. It should be remembered that chutney and relishes seem to be more highly spiced when first made, and will mellow on storage.

These products are very much a matter of personal taste, some being hot and spicy, others mild and sweet. They lend themselves to creative combinations of ingredients and to experimentation with both flavour and texture. They add considerable zest to a meal and give an imaginative touch to cold meats.

Chutney and relish are versatile products and are often used as essential fillers for the increasing corporate food hamper market. They are ideal complimentary products for producers of speciality fruit preserves such as jams and marmalades.

Market

Chutneys and relishes are low volume speciality food products that have a relatively small market share when compared to other widely distributed preserves, such as, jams and marmalades. The sale for these products is slow on the home market and requires constant product promotion. The sauces and dressings market has increased, in Ireland, from €33 million in 1999 to €40.5 million in 2003 and will continue to be quite buoyant, as penetration levels remain high (source:Minitel)

According to Minitel (market intelligence), the pickles, chutney and relish sector represents the lowest value in terms of sales in the sauces and dressings market. Greater innovation in these products would help to diminish their seasonal nature. This objective can be achieved by:

- product promotion
- exhibiting at food trade shows
- aggressive merchandising
- attractive presentation and labelling
- recipe leaflets and serving suggestions

Production Method

Fruit such as apples, gooseberries, plums, ripe tomatoes, red peppers, green peppers, etc. are bases for chutney. Onions, garlic, raisins, dates, chopped walnuts, etc. are added according to taste and to give extra interest to the texture. The vinegar, spices, sugar and salt are the preserving agents and they also contribute to the flavour and aroma of the product.



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This is one of a series of fact sheets on potential income generating activities.

All fact sheets are available in the Advisory Section of the Teagasc Website
www.teagasc.ie

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Teagasc Fact Sheets are a brief introduction to a topic. Further detailed advice should be sought before proceeding.

Fruit and vegetables: As long as they are fresh and sound, the lower grades can be used. They should be washed and carefully dried prior to use to remove any unwanted residue.

Vinegar: Brown malt vinegar is usually recommended, however, where a light colour or less intense taste is preferred, then white vinegar can be substituted. The vinegar has a slight hardening effect and can be added gradually - one quarter at start, the rest during the cooking period.

Spices: Spices are important ingredients in chutneys and relishes. Bland flavoured products are partly due to lack of enthusiasm for spices. Ground spices are normally used but whole spices can give a better flavour. Whole spices should be bruised and tied in small muslin bags before adding to the cooking mixture.

Sugar: White or brown sugar can be used depending on the type of product required. Rich dark colour will result from the use of brown sugar. When a light colour is required, white sugar is used and added fairly late in the cooking, when the other ingredients have softened.

Salt: Salt is added to taste or as recipe specifies.

Formulation: The basic ingredients, such as, apple, gooseberry, onion, etc. are cut up finely or minced so that they are not in recognisable pieces in the finished product but sultanas, raisins, small cubes of crystallised ginger, etc. are added without mincing as they give character to the texture. Onions are usually cooked separately, until soft, in a closed pan and then added to the other ingredients. The total mixture is then slowly cooked for a long period in an open pan to allow moisture to evaporate. The mixture needs to be stirred periodically, while cooking, otherwise 'caking' will occur in the bottom of pan. The chutney is ready for potting when a spoon drawn across the mixture leaves a track, which does not disintegrate immediately. The chutney should be poured into warm sterilised jars while still hot, filling to the neck of the jar. Plasticide coated lids should be used, to prevent discolouring of the product and poor flavour.

Labels: The sale of chutneys and relishes in retail outlets requires correct labelling. This provides the customer with basic information regarding the ingredients, quality and constituents of the product. A 'use-by' date of one year from date of manufacture will normally be the maximum shelf life allowable by most major retailers, although these products have a much longer shelf life.

Equipment: Stainless steel or enamel lined pans should only be used as copper, brass or iron pans give an unpleasant metallic taste to the product. In addition, only stainless steel or nylon sieves should be used in the preparation.

Establishment Costs and Profit Margins

The provision of a suitable food kitchen unit approved by the local Environment Health Officer is necessary. A good quality electric, oil, gas or solid fuel cooker with high output rings or plates costing €4,500-€7,000 is desirable. Alternatively, individual gas rings or plates can be used for the processing operations and a smaller oven for sterilisation of jars, etc. The outlay on other equipment, such as, saucepans, jugs, food processor, etc. should not be more than €800, just enough to get started. A suitable freezer may be required for storage of certain fruit and vegetables that are not in continuous fresh supply. Variable costs of fruit, vegetables, vinegar, spices, sugar, jars, lids, labels, power, labour, distribution and other general overheads should be calculated accurately. The cost of the fruit and vegetables are the main variable outlay which small scale operations can reduce significantly by growing much of their own. The local Teagasc Advisory Service can supply technical assistance in fruit and vegetable growing. Chutneys and relishes are relatively cheaper to produce than other preserves, like jams and marmalades. They are an exciting and profitable addition to the product line of those engaged in the supply of speciality home made preserves.

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