

FACTS ON Fiddleheads

BULLETIN #4198

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Fiddleheads are the young coiled fern leaves (about an inch in diameter) of the ostrich fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*). Nearly all ferns have fiddleheads, but those of the ostrich fern are unlike any other.

Fiddleheads are a Maine delicacy that appears in the early spring during April and May. Harvest the tender little rolls of fern almost as soon as they appear within an inch or two of the ground. Carefully brush out and remove the brown scales. Wash and cook the "heads" in a small amount of lightly salted boiling water for ten minutes, or steam for 20 minutes. Serve at once with melted butter. The quicker they are eaten, the more delicate their flavor. They may be served, like asparagus, on toast. Cooked, chilled fiddleheads can be also served as a salad with an onion and vinegar dressing.

Due to the short season for fiddleheads, some people like to preserve them to be used later. To freeze fiddleheads, prepare them as you would for the table. Blanch a small amount at a time for two minutes.

Cool and drain. Pack into moisture- and vapor-proof containers and store them in the freezer.

Many people are interested in pickling fiddleheads. In cooperation with the Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition at the University of Maine, Extension staff have tested some pickling recipes for

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The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has investigated a number of outbreaks of food-borne illness associated with fiddleheads. The implicated ferns were eaten either raw or lightly cooked (sautéed, parboiled or microwaved), which was what caused a food-borne illness outbreak in British Columbia in 1990. Although a toxin has not been identified in the fiddleheads of the ostrich fern, the findings of this investigation suggest that you should cook fiddleheads thoroughly before eating (boil them for at least 10 minutes).

Shrimp and Fiddlehead Medley

1 pound fiddleheads
6 ounces linguine, uncooked
6 cups water
1-3/4 pounds Maine shrimp, fresh or frozen
1 teaspoon margarine
2/3 cup onion, chopped
1/2 cup green pepper, diced
1/2 pound fresh mushrooms, sliced
1 teaspoon thyme
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1/8 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon celery seed
2 tablespoons lemon juice

Cut off ends of fiddleheads. Remove scales and wash thoroughly. Bring water to a boil in a large saucepan; add shrimp and cook three to five minutes, or until done. Drain well, and set aside. Cook fiddleheads in boiling water for ten minutes. Drain. Coat a large, nonstick skillet with cooking spray; add margarine. Heat until margarine melts. Add onion and green pepper and sauté until crisp-tender. Stir in fiddleheads. Meanwhile, cook pasta as directed, without salt or oil. Drain well, set aside and keep warm.

Add sliced mushrooms, thyme, pepper, salt and celery seeds to vegetable mixture; stir well. Cook, uncovered, over medium heat three to four minutes or until mushrooms are tender, stirring often. Stir in shrimp and lemon juice; cook until heated through, stirring often. Place pasta on a large platter. Spoon shrimp mixture on top. Serve immediately. *Serves 6.*

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fiddleheads. The most successful of these in terms of flavor, keeping quality and safety are included in this fact sheet.

Special Note: Our tests showed that the pH of these pickled fiddleheads ranged between 3.35–3.74 (liquid) and 3.38–3.78 (solids). This is important to ensure microbiological food safety. It is also important that you follow Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) to assure the safety and quality of the pickled fiddleheads, including sanitation and sterilization of jars and lids. All fiddlehead products should be hot-packed and processed for 10 minutes in a hot water bath.

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References: Facts on Edible Wild Greens in Maine, University of Maine Cooperative Extension bulletin #4060. For a copy of this bulletin, contact your county Extension office.

Acknowledgements: Many thanks to Pat Pierson, Extension educator, Waldo County; Evelyn Boynton, Hartland, Maine; and Alfred Bushway, University of Maine professor of food science and cooperating professor of entomology, for their valuable contributions in testing these recipes.

For more information, contact your University of Maine Cooperative Extension county office.

Fiddlehead Dijon

1-1/2 pounds fresh fiddleheads
1 tablespoon cornstarch
1 cup nonfat buttermilk
2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
3/4 teaspoon lemon juice
1/2 teaspoon dried tarragon
1/4 teaspoon pepper

Clean and prepare fiddleheads. Remove scales and wash thoroughly. Place fiddleheads in a vegetable steamer over boiling water. Cover and steam 20 minutes or until tender, but still crisp. Set aside, and keep warm.

Combine cornstarch and buttermilk in a small saucepan; stir well. Cook over medium heat until thickened and bubbly, stirring constantly. Remove from heat; stir in mustard, lemon juice, tarragon and pepper.

Arrange fiddleheads on a serving platter. Spoon sauce over fiddleheads. Serve immediately. *Makes 6 servings.*

Plain and Pickled Fiddleheads

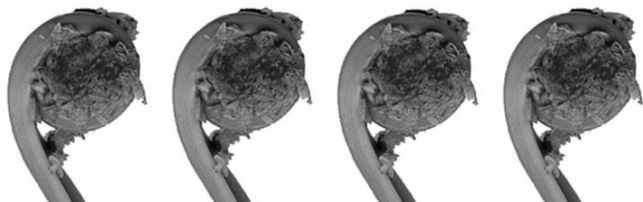
cider vinegar
sugar
1/8 teaspoon each of pepper, ground nutmeg, cinnamon, allspice and celery seed

Pour enough vinegar over the fiddleheads to cover; then strain it off into a pan. Add 1 cup sugar for every gallon of vinegar. Add spices and celery seed. Boil this syrup for 7-8 minutes; then pour over the fiddleheads in pint-sized jars. Seal and process for 10 minutes in a boiling water process canner.

Sweet Pickled Fiddleheads

1 quart cider vinegar
5 cups sugar
2 teaspoons salt

Mix vinegar, sugar and salt in saucepan; bring to a boil, pour over fiddleheads in pint-sized jars; seal; process 10 minutes in boiling water process canner. *Makes 6 pints.*



Sugar-Free Fiddlehead Pickles

- 1 gallon vinegar
- 1 teaspoon powdered saccharin (if desired)
- 1 teaspoon powdered alum
- 1/2 cup salt
- 1/2 teaspoon powdered cloves
- 1 teaspoon powdered allspice
- 1 tablespoon powdered cinnamon
- 1/2 cup dry mustard

Pack fiddleheads into jars; pour enough liquid to cover fiddleheads; seal at once. Process for 10 minutes in boiling water bath. Let stand at least two weeks before using. If the product is to be sold, it may be necessary to check with the Food and Drug Administration on the use of saccharin in this type of product.

Mustard Fiddlehead Pickles

- 1 quart button onions (peeled)
- 1 quart fiddleheads
- 2 cups salt
- 4 quarts water
- 1 cup flour
- 6 tablespoons dry mustard
- 2 cups sugar
- 2 quarts vinegar

Wash and prepare button onions and fiddleheads. Mix salt and water. Pour over fiddleheads. Let stand overnight. Bring to boil, and drain in colander. Mix flour and dry mustard. Stir in enough vinegar to make smooth paste. Add sugar and vinegar. Boil until thick and smooth, stir constantly. Add the fiddleheads and cook until they are just heated through. (Overcooking makes them soft instead of crisp.) Pour into jars and seal immediately. Process 10 minutes in boiling water process canner. *Makes 8 pints.*

Bread and Butter Fiddlehead Pickles

- 4 pounds fiddleheads
- 3 large onions, thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup salt
- cold water
- 3 trays ice cubes
- 5 cups sugar
- 5 cups cider vinegar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons turmeric
- 1 1/2 teaspoons celery seeds
- 1 1/2 teaspoons mustard seeds

In 8-quart enamel, stainless steel or glass container, stir fiddleheads, onions, salt and enough cold water to cover fiddleheads until salt dissolves; stir in ice. Cover; let stand in cool place 3 hours. Drain fiddleheads and rinse with cold running water; drain thoroughly.

Measure sugar, vinegar, turmeric, celery seeds and mustard seeds into 8-quart Dutch oven or heavy saucepan. Over high heat, heat to boiling. Reduce heat to low; simmer, uncovered 30 minutes, stirring often. Meanwhile, prepare jars and caps. Add fiddleheads and onions to Dutch oven; heat to boiling. Spoon hot fiddleheads into hot jars to 1/4 inch from the top. Immediately ladle syrup over fiddleheads. Process 10 minutes in boiling water bath. Cool jars and test for air tightness. *Makes about 6 pints.*

Quick Sour Fiddlehead Pickles

- 1/2 gallon cider vinegar
- 2 cups water
- 1/2 cup salt
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup mustard seed

Mix ingredients, bring to boil. Pour over fiddleheads in pint-sized jars; seal; process 10 minutes in boiling water process canner.

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