Pickling is one of the oldest-known methods of food preservation. For the Just family, it’s also a way to pass a tradition to the next generation — and enjoy fresh, tasty snacks.

For the past 17 years, the five grown children of Julius and Helen (Dockter) Just have gathered together the first weekend in August to can dill pickles. Their son, Walt, suggested the first pickling party, because he knew sisters Marcy and Carol knew how to make their mother’s dill pickles, and he wanted to make sure the tradition did not get lost.

Walt and his wife, Pat, owned a lake cabin in Minnesota, and for several years the pickling parties were held there. It was an ideal location, because the kids loved the lake and activities.

After the couple sold the cabin, another location was needed. The family discussed their options, and in wanting about carrying on a family tradition, they decided to head home to their roots.

Christof Just, the grandson of Julius and Helen, has taken over the family farm from his parents, Myron and Ruth Just. The farm, which was originally purchased by Julius and Helen in 1944, is located north of Berlin, in the Dakota Valley Electric Cooperative service area. The third generation of Justs to farm that land, Christof and his wife, Kelli, agreed to start hosting the pickling parties in 2011.

Pickling is a tradition now carried on by the fourth generation. Every year, family members travel to North Dakota from across the United States to have fun, tell stories, eat ethnic food and make memories — all while carrying on a family tradition.

Marcy (Just) Ludwig, a daughter of Julius and Helen, says family members work in stations to make the process seamless. The stations include scrubbing the cucumbers, cutting the garlic, making the brine, stuffing the jars, boiling the jars and sealing the lids.

Ludwig, a member of Verendrye Electric Cooperative in Minot, says they use their mother’s recipe, which has been fine-tuned. Some years they make as many as 325 jars of dill pickles.

“We opt for pints now,” she says. “Most of us in the first generation, we are now two in a family and a quart goes a long way.”

While the lake was fun, the farm has proved to be an ideal choice to hold the pickling parties.

“When we held them at the lake, it was great because of the lake. When we moved the event to the farm, the kids got to be with the animals,” Ludwig says. “Our children are having such a good time being together. They don’t look at it as a work thing; they look at it as a fun time.”

Kelli Just says her family enjoys hosting the summer parties.

“It’s great to see our family gather together at the farm while having fun, reminiscing and making new memories,” she shares.

After 15 years of organizing the pickle parties, Ludwig’s siblings announced it was time for the next generation to step forward and spearhead future events. They did — and last year, they extended the pickling to include watermelon and beans.

While the process takes time and effort, Ludwig assures that pickling is not difficult.

“If you can read and follow directions, you can do this!” she assures. The process is worth it because of the homemade taste, and family members take pride in what they are doing.

“This tradition gives us a picture from the past that we carry on for ourselves,” she concludes. “Mom and Dad were still alive when we started the pickling parties, and they thought it was a great way to get generations together. It’s especially important now, since they are both gone.”

*North Dakota Living* thanks the Just family for sharing their story.

_Carmen Devney_ is a communications specialist for the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives, Capital Electric Cooperative and Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative.
QUICK FRESH-PACK DILL PICKLES

8 lbs. of 3- to 5-inch pickling cucumbers
2 gals. water
1 ¼ cups canning or pickling salt
1 ½ qts. vinegar (5 percent acidity)
¼ cup sugar
2 quarts water
2 T. whole mixed pickling spice
3 T. whole mustard seed (2 tsp. to 1 tsp. per pint jar)
14 heads of fresh dill (1 ½ heads per pint jar) OR
4½ T. dill seed (1½ tsp per pint jar)

Wash cucumbers. Cut ¼-inch slice off blossom end and discard, but leave ¼-inch of stem attached. Dissolve ¾ cup salt in 2 gals water. Pour over cucumbers and let stand 12 hours. Drain. Combine vinegar, ½ cup salt, sugar and 2 quarts water. Add mixed pickling spices tied in a clean white cloth. Heat to boiling. Fill jars with cucumbers. Add 1 tsp. mustard seed and 1 ½ heads fresh dill per pint. Cover with boiling pickling solution, leaving ½-inch headspace. Adjust the lids and process pints for 10 minutes (0 to 1,000 feet altitude), 15 minutes (1,000 to 6,000 feet altitude) or 20 minutes (above 6,000 feet altitude). Yield: 7 to 9 pints.

North Dakota State University Extension Service

IN A PICKLE ABOUT PRESERVING FOOD?

Several years ago someone brought a jar of pickles to my office. She wanted advice for selling pickles to the public but was having pickling problems. I noticed that the liquid surrounding the pickles was milky white, a thick layer of white sediment was at the bottom, the pickles appeared shriveled, and the cover was rusted in place.

We discussed what might be happening and possible ways to fix the issues. For example, cloudy brine can indicate the presence of wild yeasts or bacteria. White sediment can form if you use iodized salt instead of canning salt.

My visitor picked up the jar and hit the cover on the edge of my table. The cover popped off, along with a fair amount of the pickling brine. Before I could blink, she pulled out a pickle and popped it in my mouth. I guess I was talking too much.

I removed the pickle and set it on my desk. I don’t recall how I explained not eating it; however, I planned to keep an arm’s length between me and clients in the future.

We talked through the commercial canning regulations. After the person left I asked my secretary to check on me in case I was slumped over at my desk after accidentally ingesting bad pickle juice.

Pickling and fermenting are long-standing methods of preserving food, but for safe, high-quality products, follow these tips from the National Center for Home Food Preservation:

• Use tested recipes and do not experiment with canning. Follow the directions carefully.
• Use your best quality, fresh produce, free of damage or spoilage.
• Always remove the blossom end from cucumbers before canning. The blossom end contains an enzyme that can lead to softening of the pickles.
• Use canning salt instead of table salt.
• Use vinegar with 5 percent acetic acid.

Until next time, visit www.ag.ndsu.edu/food for more information about canning, pickling, freezing and drying foods.

Julie Garden-Robinson is a professor and food and nutrition specialist with the North Dakota State University Extension Service. To learn more, visit www.ag.ndsu.edu/food.