Prep time: 30 minutes (plus 2 hours salting) | Cook time: 25–30 minutes | Total time: About 3 hours

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Equipment

- Box grater or food processor with a shredding disc

- Large colander

- Large heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven
- Wooden spoon
- Clean glass jars with lids (sterilized if canning)
- Water bath canner (optional, for shelf-stable storage)
- Ladle and jar funnel

Instructions

Step 1: Grate and Salt the Vegetables

Grate the zucchini using the coarse side of a box grater or a food processor. In a large bowl, combine the grated zucchini, chopped onions, and chopped bell peppers. Sprinkle with pickling salt and toss thoroughly. Cover and let stand at room temperature for 2 hours. The salt draws out excess water, which is essential for a relish that isn’t watery.

Step 2: Drain and Rinse

After 2 hours, transfer the mixture to a colander and press firmly with your hands or the back of a spoon to squeeze out as much liquid as possible. Rinse briefly under cold running water to remove excess salt, then squeeze dry again—really press hard. You should end up with roughly 4 cups of firmly packed, drained vegetables.

Step 3: Combine the Brine

In a large heavy-bottomed pot, combine the vinegar, sugar, mustard seeds, celery seeds, turmeric, black pepper, and cloves (if using). Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring until the sugar dissolves.

Step 4: Add the Vegetables

Add the drained vegetable mixture to the pot and stir well. Return to a gentle boil, then reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer uncovered for 20–25 minutes, stirring occasionally. The relish should thicken and the vegetables should become tender but still retain some texture.

Step 5: Thicken (Optional)

If you prefer a thicker relish, stir in the cornstarch slurry during the last 3 minutes of simmering and cook, stirring, until the relish coats the back of a spoon.

Step 6: Taste and Adjust

Taste the relish and adjust: add a splash more vinegar for tang, a spoonful of sugar for sweetness, or a pinch of salt if needed. Remember the flavors will mellow slightly after cooling.

Step 7: Fill the Jars

Ladle the hot relish into clean, sterilized jars, leaving ½ inch (1 cm) of headspace. Remove air bubbles by running a knife around the inside of each jar, then wipe the rims clean and seal with lids.

Step 8: Process (for Shelf-Stable Storage)

For shelf-stable relish, process jars in a boiling water bath: 10 minutes for half-pint jars and

15 minutes for pint jars (adjust for altitude). Lift jars out and cool on a towel-lined counter for 12–24 hours until lids seal (they should not flex when pressed).

Step 9: Cool and Store

For refrigerator relish, simply cool the jars to room temperature, then refrigerate. Let the relish rest at least 24 hours before eating so the flavors meld.

Time and Intensity Guide

Stage	Time	Intensity Level
Grating and chopping vegetables	20–25 min	Medium (active, steady work)
Salting and resting	2 hours	Low (passive)
Draining and squeezing	8–10 min	Medium–High (physical effort)
Making the brine	5 min	Low
Simmering relish	20–25 min	Low–Medium (occasional stirring)
Jarring and sealing	10–15 min	Medium (careful, hot handling)
Water bath processing	10–15 min	Low–Medium
Cooling and resting	12–24 hours	Low (passive)

Overall intensity: Low to Moderate — short bursts of active chopping and jarring separated by passive resting and simmering.

Tips for the Best Relish

- Squeeze hard. Watery relish is the most common failure; press the salted vegetables firmly.

- Keep pieces uniform. Consistent chopping gives a better texture and even cooking.
- Use fresh pickling salt. Iodized table salt can darken the relish and add off-flavors.
- Don’t skip the rest time. The 24-hour flavor meld makes a noticeable difference.
- Follow tested canning guidance. If canning, use current USDA-approved processing times for your altitude.

Variations

- Spicy: Add 1–2 finely chopped jalapeños or ½ teaspoon chili flakes.
- Dill Zucchini Relish: Add 1 teaspoon dill seeds and 2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill.
- Lower Sugar: Reduce sugar to 1 cup for a tangier, less sweet relish (note: sugar also affects preservation, so adjust canning accordingly).
- Yellow Squash Version: Substitute half the zucchini with yellow summer squash for color variation.

Serving Suggestions

Serve on hot dogs, hamburgers, bratwurst, and sausages; stir into tuna or chicken salad; spread on grilled cheese or deli sandwiches; or spoon over cream cheese with crackers as an appetizer.

Nutrition Information (per serving)

Based on 40 servings (about 2 tablespoons each); values are approximate.

Nutrient	Amount per Serving
Calories	~35 kcal
Total Fat	0 g
— Saturated Fat	0 g
Carbohydrates	9 g
— Dietary Fiber	0.5 g
— Sugars	8 g
Protein	0.3 g
Sodium	~150 mg
Vitamin C	~10% DV