

## Foodie Freak: Ode to the pickle jar

Contributed by Ross A. Christensen  
Sunday, 18 May 2008

That's right: the pickle jar, pasta sauce jar, or Mason jar, any one of these jars is what I consider one of the most valuable kitchen utensils you can own. I own several jars of all different sizes in my kitchen just so I can always have one ready to use.

Why do I think jars are so useful? Because every minute you spend stirring something could be handled in just a few seconds of shaking it in a jar.

Next time you make scrambled eggs try cracking the eggs into a jar, cover and shake for 15 seconds. You will notice that the eggs no longer have that phlegm-like consistency but a much smoother, liquid-like texture.

The act of shaking actually denatures the proteins and causes the egg to become homogenized. Homogenization is what they do to milk with cream in it in order to keep the cream from clumping together and floating to the top. When the molecules are pulverized during homogenization they lose the ability to recombine and the milk and cream stay mixed.

Emulsification is a process similar to homogenization, where you are trying to get two dissimilar liquids to mix together. Vinegar and oil don't want to stay mixed, but if you add an emulsifier like mustard and then mix them they will stay together. Performing this process in a jar by shaking it combines the ingredients much faster and more thoroughly than if you were using a whisk.

This also works for making pancake batter, Kool-aid, salad dressing, sauces, you name it! Heck, I've even made hollandaise sauce in a jar (although I don't recommend it, too hot!). When you want something mixed quickly, you just gotta try using a jar.

OK, so I'll admit there are some things for which a jar is not suited.

You can't make a meringue or mayonnaise in a jar, for example. I'm not saying that jars are a cure-all; I'm just saying that using a jar eliminates a lot of prep work and clean up. No more big mixing bowls &ndash; use a jar! No more difficult-to-clean whisks or mixing beaters &ndash; use a jar! Save space in the dishwasher &ndash; use a jar!

Remember I mentioned making salad dressings in a jar? I want to encourage you to try some different ways of making salad dressing. Not only make them in the jar, but try some different ingredients.

For instance, instead of using plain vegetable oil try using chicken fat. You will need to use this immediately after cooking the chicken, because the fat will want to solidify and isn't shelf-stable, but it tastes fantastic on your salad. Now I didn't say it was a healthy salad dressing, I said it was delicious; you need to splurge every once in a while.

Another thing to try is to substitute the vinegar with some brine that you would normally throw out.

For example, I love dill and garlic pepperoncinis. When I'm done with them I use the brine that they are pickled in for salad dressings and additions to soup. It just adds a little extra flavor and that "Whoa!" factor. I even use the brine from jalapeno peppers for making a glaze for shrimp, and yeah, I mix it in a jar.

Ross A. Christensen is an award-winning gardener and gourmet cook. He is the author of "Sushi A to Z, The Ultimate Guide" and is currently working on a new book. He has been a public speaker for many years and enjoys being involved in the community.

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