

Chow-Chow

['chɑʊ-,chɑʊ]-n: an American pickled relish made from a combination of vegetables.

INTRO BY STEPHANIE BURT

THE MUCH LAUDED (and sadly recently departed) food historian John Egerton asserted that Southern chow-chow originated from nineteenth-century Chinese railroad workers, and that makes sense to us. “Chow mein,” served at many a Westernized Chinese restaurant, sounds as if it could be a relative, and the Chinese are known for their use of mustard, a standard chow-chow ingredient. Whatever its origin, chow-chow quickly became a staple of the Southern pantry. It seems that almost every grandmother south of the Mason-Dixon has a version of chow-chow. With good reason—it is ultra-practical. All that late-summer produce seems to ripen all at once, doesn't it? And if frost is forecast, the windowsills and every conceivable available countertop

space becomes covered with green tomatoes. Quick work needs to be made of all these precious foodstuffs before they go to waste. My family made our chow-chow out of oversized cucumbers, but green tomato is a traditional star ingredient and cabbage is also common. Chef Josh Quick of Odette in Florence, Alabama, puts up pickles for the restaurant as well as his home kitchen, and he loves to gain inspiration from community cookbooks and then play with his own spice blends, with adding other vegetables for variety. And in addition to chow-chow's traditional use as a topping for field peas and pinto beans, “if you have a heavy dish, it can add acidity, crunch, and brighten up the flavor,” Quick says. “I'd serve it on catfish, beans, fried chicken, grilled sausages, pork, and smoked chicken.”

PHOTOS BY ABRAHAM ROWE





RECIPES FROM CHEF JOSH QUICK
OF ODETTA IN FLORENCE, ALABAMA

CAULIFLOWER CHOW-CHOW

- 2 heads cauliflower, cut into small florets
- 6 ribs celery, cut diagonally
- 2 shallots, thinly sliced
- 2 carrots, julienned
- 1 large red bell pepper, finely diced
- 3 tablespoons kosher salt, separated
- 16 ounces cider vinegar
- 16 ounces water
- 1 tablespoon mustard powder
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ½ teaspoon cloves
- 6 bay leaves
- 2 tablespoons fresh ginger, grated
- 2 teaspoons allspice
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper

1. Combine vegetables and 2 tablespoons of salt in a large mixing bowl and mix well.
2. Transfer into a colander and place over

bowl to drain for at least 8 hours or overnight.

3. Sanitize jars.
4. Bring remaining ingredients to a simmer (including remaining salt). Cook for 5 minutes.
5. While vinegar solution cools slightly, fill jars with vegetable mixture.
6. Pour vinegar solution over vegetables, cover with lids, and refrigerate. The chow-chow will be ready to eat in 3 days and keeps refrigerated for 2–3 months.

Yield: 3 pints

GREEN TOMATO CHOW-CHOW

- 5 pounds green tomatoes, medium diced
- 2 pounds yellow onion, julienned
- 2 red Serrano peppers, finely diced
- 4 green bell peppers, finely diced
- 1 large head cabbage, julienned
- ½ cup kosher salt, separated
- 3 cups cider vinegar
- 3-inch piece fresh ginger, finely diced

- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 3 cups brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons whole mustard seeds
- ¼ teaspoon ground cloves

1. Mix tomatoes, onion, Serrano peppers, green peppers, and cabbage with half of salt. Put in a colander set inside a bowl to drain overnight.
2. Sanitize jars and have them ready in water bath.
3. Combine all ingredients in a stainless steel pot and bring to a low simmer, skimming any foam that rises to the top. Continue cooking and skimming until reduced by a third.
4. Add mixture into prepared canning jars and process for 10 minutes.
5. Let jars rest for a few days before eating to allow flavors to develop.

Yield: 5 pints