

With Relish

by Angie

"When I pass a flowering zucchini plant in a garden, my heart skips a beat."

- Gwyneth Paltrow

Catherine regarded the long line of long green gourds on her counter with something like dismay. They had been waiting for her when she made her way into the kitchen for breakfast. Vincent, unable to give up a lifetime of early rising, had picked them from the garden, then left them for her before heading below for his regular duties. A heavy hint, she assumed. Why were zucchini plants so prolific?

The doorbell rang and she went to let Jenny in. The two of them had a standing agreement to meet for coffee one a week, and today, Wednesday, was Catherine's turn. They usually sat in their kitchens, neither one being particularly interested in braving the cafe crowd anymore.

Jenny entered the kitchen ahead of her and immediately broke into laughter. Catherine rolled her eyes at her friend and went to pour the coffee.

"And which one of these is, you know, closest to the size of ... um ... you know?" Jenny asked in a falsetto voice.

Catherine's grunt was not encouraging, so her friend asked a more answerable question.

"What are you going to do with them?"

"Well, you can have two to take home, but that still leaves too many. William has made cake, muffins, cookies, soups, fricassees, and I don't know what else. He can't keep up. And still there are more of them. Any ideas?"

Jenny sat down with her coffee and got a thoughtful look.

"You know, there's always someone in *my* family with too many of the darn things. We've done all the usual recipes *ad nauseum* too, but last year my cousin found a recipe that we all loved. Pickled zucchini.

"Oh no you don't!. I don't want to go through all that hassle with chopping, boiling and sterilized sealing jars," Catherine objected.

"No, this is pickled zucchini, not zucchini pickle!" Jenny corrected her. "Not the same thing at all. In fact it's so simple it can be done in a few minutes. All you really need is one of those snap top storage jars with the rubber ring. You may need a few of them for all the zucchini you have, but I know it won't go to waste."

"I probably have one or two of those jars," Catherine mused. She used them to store dry goods, especially pasta and lentils, to make them easy to find in her cupboards. She could move the contents of one or two into something else if needed.

"When can I have the recipe?" she asked.

"Right now. It's so simple I have it memorized."

Catherine gave her a pen and paper and she quickly wrote it down, with the brief instructions.

Cartherine looked at it in amazement. She had everything on hand!

"And it's good?"

"Better than good," Jenny quipped, mimicking Mouse.

Catherine laughed.

When Jenny had gone, Catherine found an empty jar, washed and rinsed it carefully, then set to work chopping a couple of the smaller remaining zucchini and a large red onion into thin slices while she boiled the vinegar mixture. It really was simple!

She layered the onion and zucchini into the jar, tightly as directed, then poured the mixture over it. Now it went into the refrigerator for at least 12 hours.

She said nothing to Vincent about the new recipe and hid the jar at the back of the fridge, where she knew he wouldn't look. He hated rooting through it and always took what he could see easily.

The next day, she made a lunch of pork chops and mashed potatoes, and quietly added the jar of pickles to the table. Vincent, curious as always, opened the jar and stuck his nose close to smell it.

He smiled. Dill! He loved dill! They had it in their garden. It usually went to William for his pickles.

He spooned some of the pickle onto his plate and sampled it with eyes closed, knowing that Catherine was watching him for his reaction. His eyes popped open in amazement as the taste hit his tongue. He looked up and grinned at her.

"Catherine, this is wonderful! And you used our zucchini! We must tell William about this. He is still trying to decide what to do with the last batch I took him."

Trying some herself, Catherine smiled in turn.

"Yummy!" she commented. "William can thank Jenny, Vincent. I would never have thought that such a simple recipe would be so good."

Two days later, several large snap top jars were lined up in William's kitchen and he regarded them with pride. He'd had to increase the amounts in the recipe, but having tried it himself, he was sure it would be a welcome addition to the meal. Condiments were not often available below, being somewhat time-consuming to make and needing large quantities of a suitable raw vegetable. Now he wondered if the technique could be used on other vegetables.

He shrugged and spooned generous portions into bowls, added a fork to each, then gave them to the servers to distribute around the dining tables. Pickle would be a nice addition to the leftover cold chicken and fried potatoes on the menu.

He stood in the kitchen doorway and waited for reactions. He was not disappointed. Father was the first to exclaim.

"Why this reminds me of the quick pickle my mother used to make."

There were similar compliments from around the dining chamber and William looked at

Catherine, who was grinning from ear to ear. She gave him a thumbs-up and he returned it. "They seem to be eating it with relish," Vincent commented *soto voce* to Catherine. "And it sure got us out of a pickle!" Catherine retorted to him in kind. They laughed together, getting some curious looks, but not for long. Everyone was eating with concentration. And from the look of it, Catherine mused, the pickle wasn't going to last long. Good thing there was a seemingly endless supply of zucchini!



END