

צָלָף קוֹצָנִי – Caper – *Capparis Spinosa*

A Rebbetzin's Shabbat Confession

I must confess! Although Shabbat is the centerpiece of my blessings – after 37 years of living a Torah observant life – I'm still struggling to keep Shabbat fully. Don't get me wrong. Every week I look forward to the serene Shabbat experience: enjoying tranquil Torah learning in my garden, relaxed gourmet health-food meals with family and guests, intimate nature walks, or just lying on the couch, nibbling dried pineapple, while allowing myself to read to my heart's desire. Shabbat is central to my life: On Shabbat in the Old City of Jerusalem, many years ago, when I lit the candles for the very first time, I returned home to my spiritual heritage. A few months afterwards – on Shabbat – at a meal in the home of friends, I met my husband. On Shabbat, he proposed, and we have been happily married for more than 36 years. Apparently, my spiritual destiny and Shabbat is closely intertwined. This may be why Shabbat is also such a challenge for me. What could be so hard about enjoying one day a week by relaxing from work? If you are used to living intensively, always multitasking, cleaning and organizing your home while socializing, then, shifting gears and abstaining from certain work can be quite trying. It is not that I would turn on the computer, grab my guitar, or write an SMS on Shabbat, G-d forbid. However, the gray areas are challenging. For example, I can easily sing Shabbat *zemirot* while folding laundry in the hallway (so no-one sees!). [Being careful to avoid folding laundry on its original creases](#), I leave the pants for *Motzei Shabbat* (Saturday night). As a perfectionist who hates seeing dishes pile up in the sink, I am compelled to ensure that they are all cleared away, [even if there is only the slightest possibility that we need to use these dishes again on Shabbat](#), and so on. I think you get the picture.



My Shabbat Observance Measuring Rod

What does my Shabbat observance challenge have to do with the exquisite caper bush? *Capparis spinosa* is native to the Mediterranean. Capers grow wild in Israel. In Jerusalem, they grow everywhere, yet they specifically love to nestle in between rocks on stonewalls. Many years ago, we had the most prolific volunteer caper bushes growing smack in the middle of where we were trying to plant a lawn. In the week of *Parashat Pinchas*, where the Shabbat breaker, Tzefachad (whose name means sharp caper) is mentioned, I would proudly take my students, during herbal workshop, to pick capers in my backyard. Since moving the caper plants to the edge of our garden, it was never the same. I could sadly only gather a handful of capers, hardly enough to pickle. Every year since then, when we approach *Parashat Pinchas*, I've been watching my caper plants disappointedly. Having learned about the inherent link between Shabbat observance and the caper plant, and being endowed with a generous measure of Jewish guilt, I naturally made the connection. The more careful I would become in keeping the gray areas of Shabbat observance, the more my caper plant would grow and yield its desired, heavenly flowers. [Learn about the Mystical Connection between the Cryptic Caper Bush and Shabbat Observance and more.](#)

I pray, struggle and hope that one day, soon, I will be able to refine my Shabbat observance and be able to prepare pickled capers with my students from the capers growing in my own garden!

Health Benefits of Capers

Capers made from unopened caper flower buds are rich in flavonoid compounds including rutin and quercetin. Both these compounds are potent sources of antioxidants. Capers contain minerals like iron, calcium, copper and high levels of sodium. They are also abundant in vitamins such as vitamin A, vitamin K, niacin, and riboflavin (vitamin B2).

[Anti-inflammatory](#)

Capers have been used as a treatment for rheumatic pain from the time of ancient Greece.

[Relieves Flatulence](#)

Capers improve digestion, maintain the health of the digestive tract and help us prevent flatulence.

[Congestion Relief](#)

Capers reduce phlegm, and relieve chest congestion.

[Lowers Blood- Sugar](#)

Capers help to keep diabetes in check. They contain chemicals that lower blood sugar.

[Benefits the Skin & Hair](#)

Capers are good for dry skin. They also treat skin disorders such as skin redness, irritation and pimples. Capers are widely used in hair care products since they are rich in vitamin B and iron, which are known for promoting hair growth. Vitamin B helps blood circulation in our body. Iron helps to prevent hair loss.

Hands On

Pickled capers is a delicacy that adds relish to your Shabbat meal. They are a distinctive ingredient in Italian cuisine, especially in Sicilian cooking. Capers are often served with cold smoked salmon or cured salmon dishes. Capers and caper berries are sometimes substituted for olives. Caper leaves and fruit enhance fish and chicken, as a relish. You can also add them into salads. The Greeks occasionally put caper leaves and stems in mixed salads.

Pickled Capers

Choose only tightly closed flower buds. Even a little opening in the husk will make a bud go mushy in the pickling. Rinse the dust off and throw out anything with wormholes. Soak your crop for three days, changing water daily, to get rid of bitterness. Even caper leaves are pickle-able. Don't bother picking individual leaves. Just cut the tips off some shoots. You'll have to scissor away any thorns at home. For pickling the shoots, cut them into finger-sized lengths. Pick only the smaller, green, oval fruit. The more mature seeds are bitter and spoil the flavor.

Basic Ingredients

- ½ Cup clean, fresh capers
- ½ Cup natural vinegar
- ½ Cup water
- 1 Tablespoon salt

Optional Ingredients According to Taste and Availability

- 1 medium onion, thinly sliced

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½ Lemon, thinly sliced
1 Teaspoon pickling spice
1 Clove garlic, mashed
4 to 6 peppercorns
A handful of bay-leaves
½ Teaspoon celery seed

1. Have ready ½ cup of soaked and drained caper buds, leaves or stems.
2. Make a brine of ½ cup apple cider vinegar, ½ cup water and 1 tablespoon salt.
3. Put your caper products in a glass jar and cover with the brine. Leave for 3 days, then taste. If you like it, start using.
4. You may choose to continue pickling for one week. Either way, once you're satisfied with the taste, store in the refrigerator.

Notes: for pickled caper fruits, proceed as above, but start tasting only after a week.