

Courtesy of the Wild Fermentation Facebook Group

Vegetable fermentation is an ancient tradition for preserving vegetables, with unique recipes from all parts of the world. When fresh vegetables are shredded and layered with salt, or submerged whole in a salt-water brine, healthy lactic acid bacteria convert the starches to acids, preserving the veggies with all their nutrients in a safe acid brine. Benefits of lactic acid fermentation include:

- Preventing spoilage of fresh foods, keeping them edible through the lean winter months.
- Preserving vitamins, minerals, and enzymes.
- Creating healthy organic acids that aid digestion and keep our bowels at the proper pH.
- Providing beneficial bacteria that function as probiotics in our bodies.
- Adding interest to meals with bright, tangy flavor that gets the digestive juices flowing.

GETTING STARTED

Fermenting vegetables at home is easy! All you need is: fresh vegetables, salt, clean water, a jar or crock, a weight. For best results, be sure to choose:

- Vegetables that are fresh and free of spoiled spots or mold.
- Salt that is pure and does not contain anti-caking agents or added iodine.
- Water that has been purified or filtered to remove chlorine and chloramines.
- Clean jar or crock in good condition and with an opening wide enough to fit your hand.
- A weight made of food-safe glass or ceramic. A small jar or shot glass may be used in a jar, and a plate in a crock. In a pinch one may use a plastic baggy filled with brine.

DRY SALTING

Vegetables can be “dry salted” or shredded and layered with salt to ferment in their own juices. Good candidates for dry salting include: cabbage, carrots, beets, turnips, radishes, rutabagas, onions. Try different combinations of these for endless variety! The amount of salt one uses depends on personal taste. Here are some guidelines:

- 2% salt by weight is a good general choice. This is about 10g, or 2 teaspoons, fine grind salt per 1lb. of vegetables.
- 3% salt by weight when weather is warm or a stronger flavor is desired. This is about 15g, or 3 teaspoons, fine grind salt per 1lb. of vegetables.

Use of a home scale to weigh vegetables and salt makes getting the right salinity easy, however it is possible to go by taste. As you mix the shredded vegetables and salt have a taste now and then - they should be a little saltier than a potato chip, so that you wouldn't want to eat a bowlful, but not so salty that you need to spit it out.

BRINING

To make a classic pickle instead of a kraut, whole vegetables or sticks or chunks can be submerged in a salt water brine. Good candidates for pickles in brine are: cucumbers, carrot sticks, green beans, radishes, asparagus, sugar snap peas, cauliflower florets, sliced jalapenos. The amount of salt is determined by personal taste, and also by how watery the vegetables are. Mix salt into water to create a brine of the desired strength, and then pour the brine over the vegetables:

- 2% brine is a good basic brine for most vegetables. This is about 1 tablespoon of fine grind salt per quart of water.
- 3.5% brine is good for softer veggies like chiles or for making half-sour cucumber pickles. This is about 2 tablespoons of fine grind salt per quart of water.
- 5% brine for classic full-sour cucumber pickles. This is about 3 tablespoons fine grind salt per quart of water.

TECHNIQUE

For either dry-salting or brining all vegetables should be packed into a clean jar or crock, leaving a little space at the top for bubbling and foam. A weight should be placed on top of the vegetables to make sure they remain under the brine at all times. Any vegetable that floats on top or pokes above the brine can become moldy. The jar or crock should be covered with a lid or plastic wrap to prevent bugs and mold from getting in, while allowing gas from the fermenting vegetables to escape. Vegetables ferment best between 60-70°F, but can be done at warmer temperatures. Fermenting time takes from 4-12 weeks for dry-salted vegetables (such as sauerkraut) and 2-6 weeks for brined vegetables (such as pickles).

MAKING KOMBUCHA AT HOME

Courtesy of the Wild Fermentation Facebook Group

Kombucha is a delicious, traditional fermented tea beverage with a long history in Eastern Europe and Asia. A kombucha mother, or SCOBY (Symbiotic Colony of Bacteria and Yeasts), is placed in sweetened tea where it uses the sugars and nutrients to create beneficial organic acids that promote health and wellness. Carefully bottled, it can become effervescent, serving as a substitute for sugary sodas. Fermenting kombucha at home is easy and fun!

GETTING STARTED

With just a few basic supplies you can have a lifetime supply of your own delicious kombucha. These include:

- A kombucha mother (also called SCOBY). These can often be obtained for free from a friend or on Craigslist, or by growing one from a bottle of raw kombucha from the store.
- A large glass jar for brewing, at least 1 gallon.
- Water - purified, filtered, or spring water free of chlorine and chloramines is best.
- Tea - black, green, white, or oolong (or a combination).
- Sugar (refined or white sugar has the most pleasing taste).

BREWING YOUR KOMBUCHA

For 1 gallon kombucha you will need:

- 1 kombucha mother with 1 cup fermented kombucha (starter tea)
- 15 cups water
- 8 teabags or 3 tablespoons loose tea
- 1 cup sugar

Bring 1 quart of water to a boil and remove from heat. Add the teabags or loose tea and allow to steep for desired amount of time. Remove the tea and stir in 1 cup sugar to dissolve. Add another quart of cool water. In the clean jar, pour 1 quart of cool water. Add the sweetened tea. Check the temperature with a finger or thermometer. It should not be hot - 95°F or cooler. Add the kombucha mother and 1 cup starter tea. Add remaining 3 cups water, or enough to fill jar to the shoulder. Kombucha needs a wide surface area to ferment, so don't fill the jar to the narrow neck. Cover the top with a thin cloth, coffee filter, or paper towel secured with a rubber band and set in a dark spot to ferment.

Soon a new baby SCOBY will form on the top of the brew. When it is at least ¼" thick, carefully slide a straw down the inside of the container to the liquid below and place your finger over the top to trap some liquid. See how it tastes. The flavor of kombucha is tart & sweet. How tart it gets is a matter of preference. In warm weather it will be ready sooner. Typical fermenting times are 1-2 weeks. Remember that a tarter kombucha is healthier - it has more beneficial acids and less sugar.

When the kombucha is at the flavor you like, remove the SCOBY with clean hands. Often the mother and baby will be stuck together. Peel them apart and set aside one with 1 cup of the finished kombucha tea as starter for your new batch. Save the other in a small jar with enough finished kombucha to cover it. This smaller jar becomes your "SCOBY hotel" where you keep a backup supply of SCOBYs to share with friends or use to start a new batch if something goes awry.

Your finished kombucha is now ready for drinking. Transfer it to single-serve bottles or small jars for convenience. Rinse out your brewing vessel and start a new batch right away with the SCOBY and 1 cup kombucha you've reserved.

BOTTLING

Kombucha may be bottle conditioned for effervescence. When bottle conditioning, explosive amounts of carbonation can be created. Choose your bottles carefully. Plastic bottles are safest. If choosing glass, only heavy-duty EZ-Cap or Grolsch bottles from a homebrew supplier should be used. Keep the bottles in a closed cabinet or cooler at all times and check them frequently. Always refrigerate before serving. Bottles may be filled with:

- Plain kombucha.
- Kombucha with a small amount of juice.
- Kombucha with a small amount of fresh, frozen, or dried fruits.
- Kombucha with herbs or spices, or herbal teas.

Left at room temperature for a few days, the bacteria will continue fermenting and create carbonation.

RESOURCES: Wild Fermentation, by Sandor Katz; Wild Fermentation FB Group; www.KombuchaKamp.com