

Superhealthy Home Made Sauerkraut

Until I came of age I lived in the countryside and my family owned a very large garden. My mother used to make sauerkraut every year from homegrown cabbage to preserve it to last through the winter. I recall how much I enjoyed that fermented cabbage. We usually added to it chopped onion and sunflower oil which enhanced the taste of cabbage. It was delicious! Probably the only type and form of vegetable I was ever able to tolerate taste-wise.

Sauerkraut is one of the oldest forms of preserved food. In fact, the vegetable's diverse qualities appear to be more relevant now, than ever. One of the main reasons for the resurgence in sauerkraut's popularity is that it is low in calories, contains virtually no fat, and can satiate hunger in a flash. Other factors include its ability to stimulate digestion and remove undigested food from the gut. Sauerkraut is healthiest in its raw form. Sebastian Kneipp, the 19th century Bavarian priest and co-founder of naturopathic medicine, called sauerkraut: "The broom that cleans the intestines". However, we are interested in sauerkraut mostly because we seriously intend to keep our problematic candida in check.

How It Is Made in theory:

Sauerkraut is made by placing salt between layers of finely shredded cabbage and then subjecting it to pressure, which bruises the cabbage and squeezes out its juices. It then ferments. Making your own sauerkraut is a remarkably simple process that requires just two basic ingredients — shredded cabbage and salt.

Once you've shredded the cabbage, you'll need to pack it tightly in a suitable container. Many people use a large crock, but a food-grade plastic bucket also works. Next, you'll need to put something heavy on top of the shredded cabbage, which will help it release water. The usual technique is to cover the cabbage with a plate, and then put a couple of clean rocks on top. If that seems a little too old-fashioned, a bag full of water also works as a weight.

At this point, you can sit back and let the cabbage ferment. The shredded cabbage releases water, which combines with the salt to form vegetable brine. Bacteria on the cabbage create lactic acid, which acts as a preservative. As the cabbage ferments, scum floats to the top of the container. Don't worry, scum is normal. Just remove it regularly so it doesn't inhibit fermentation.

Cabbage ferments quickly at room temperature and will be ready to eat in two or three weeks. At cooler temperatures, fermentation is slower, but the kraut stays crunchier and may have better flavor. Also, sauerkraut will spoil more quickly if you don't keep it cool (if it turns dark brown, it's spoiled) so keep it in a cool place, such as a refrigerator or root cellar, unless you plan to can it or eat it all within a few weeks.

How I Made it

Ste one:

I wash cabbage and other tools which I will need in the process (knife, spoon, two crock 3 gallon buckets, large bowl, two ceramic plates which fit the buckets, two one gallon jars full of water). I also make sure to have at hand sea salt and two towels to cover the cabbage after it was packed in the buckets.

Step two:

I grate cabbage and placed it into a large bowl, sprinkling salt on the cabbage as I proceed. When the bowl is full of grated and salted cabbage I pack it into the buckets.

Step three:

To fill the bucket properly I put just a bit into it at a time and tamp it down hard using my fists. This tamping packs the kraut tight in the crock and helps force water out of the cabbage. I crush the mixture with my hands until liquid came out of the cabbage freely.

Step four:

I place a plate on top of the cabbage, then a weight (glass jar with water) on top of the plate. I cover the bucket with towel

Step five:

If I have time I check the cabbage every day. I scoop the scum off the top, repack and check again the next day.

Important

As a food preservation technique, fermentation is not an exact science — unlike canning, which requires specific techniques for safety reasons. The proportions in these sauerkraut recipes can be adjusted to taste, including the amount of salt. Salt is a preservative, so using more of it creates a crunchier, longer-lasting sauerkraut. Less salt produces a softer sauerkraut that may not keep as long. Many recipes call for 3 tablespoons salt for every 5 pounds of cabbage, but this can be reduced. No-salt sauerkraut is theoretically possible, but not recommended.

Garlic Sauerkraut

Follow the above recipe, adding 5 cloves of chopped garlic and 2 sliced onions when you add the salt.

Spicy Sauerkraut

Follow the above recipe, adding 3 sliced poblano peppers when you add the salt. Leave the seeds in the sliced peppers for added heat!

Sauersprouts

Follow the above recipe, but also chop 5 to 10 Brussels sprouts and thoroughly mix into the cabbage when you add the salt.

EXPERIMENT WITH OTHER INGREDIENTS

Making Sauerkraut is Easy!

Sandor Ellix Katz, the creator of this site and the author of *Wild Fermentation: The Flavor, Nutrition, and Craft of Live-Culture Foods* (Chelsea Green, 2003) has earned the nickname "Sandorkraut" for his love of sauerkraut. This is Sandorkaut's easy sauerkraut recipe, one of more than 90 ferments included in his book.

Timeframe: 1-4 weeks (or more)

Special Equipment:

- * Ceramic crock or food-grade plastic bucket, one-gallon capacity or greater
- * Plate that fits inside crock or bucket
- * One-gallon jug filled with water (or a scrubbed and boiled rock)
- * Cloth cover (like a pillowcase or towel)

Ingredients (for 1 gallon):

- * 5 pounds cabbage
- * 3 tablespoons sea salt

Process:

1. Chop or grate cabbage, finely or coarsely, with or without hearts, however you like it. I love to mix green and red cabbage to end up with bright pink kraut. Place cabbage in a large bowl as you chop it.

2. Sprinkle salt on the cabbage as you go. The salt pulls water out of the cabbage (through osmosis), and this creates the brine in which the cabbage can ferment and sour without rotting. The salt also has the effect of keeping the cabbage crunchy, by inhibiting organisms and enzymes that soften it. 3 tablespoons of salt is a rough guideline for 5 pounds of cabbage. I never measure the salt; I just shake some on after I chop up each cabbage. I use more salt in summer, less in winter.

3. Add other vegetables. Grate carrots for a coleslaw-like kraut. Other vegetables I've added include onions, garlic, seaweed, greens, Brussels sprouts, small whole heads of cabbage, turnips, beets, and burdock roots. You can also add fruits (apples, whole or sliced, are classic), and herbs and spices (caraway seeds, dill seeds, celery seeds, and juniper berries are classic, but anything you like will work). Experiment.

4. Mix ingredients together and pack into crock. Pack just a bit into the crock at a time and tamp it down hard using your fists or any (other) sturdy kitchen implement. The tamping packs the kraut tight in the crock and helps force water out of the cabbage.

5. Cover kraut with a plate or some other lid that fits snugly inside the crock. Place a clean weight (a glass jug filled with water) on the cover. This weight is to force water out of the cabbage and then keep the cabbage submerged under the brine. Cover the whole thing with a cloth to keep dust and flies out.

6. Press down on the weight to add pressure to the cabbage and help force water out of it. Continue doing this periodically (as often as you think of it, every few hours), until the brine rises above the cover. This can take up to about 24 hours, as the salt draws water out of the cabbage slowly. Some cabbage, particularly if it is old, simply contains less water. If the brine does not rise above the plate level by the next day, add enough salt water to bring the brine level above the plate. Add about a teaspoon of salt to a cup of water and stir until it's completely dissolved.

7. Leave the crock to ferment. I generally store the crock in an unobtrusive corner of the kitchen where I won't forget about it, but where it won't be in anybody's way. You could also store it in a cool basement if you want a slower fermentation that will preserve for longer.

8. Check the kraut every day or two. The volume reduces as the fermentation proceeds. Sometimes mold appears on the surface. Many books refer to this mold as "scum," but I prefer to think of it as a bloom. Skim what you can off of the surface; it will break up and you will probably not be able to remove all of it. Don't worry about this. It's just a surface phenomenon, a result of contact with the air. The kraut itself is under the anaerobic protection of the brine. Rinse off the plate and the weight. Taste the kraut. Generally it starts to be tangy after a few days, and the taste gets stronger as time passes. In the cool temperatures of a cellar in winter, kraut can keep improving for months and months. In the summer or in a heated room, its life cycle is more rapid. Eventually it becomes soft and the flavor turns less pleasant.

9. Enjoy. I generally scoop out a bowl- or jarful at a time and keep it in the fridge. I start when the kraut is young and enjoy its evolving flavor over the course of a few weeks. Try the sauerkraut juice that will be left in the bowl after the kraut is eaten. Sauerkraut juice is a rare delicacy and unparalleled digestive tonic. Each time you scoop some kraut out of the crock, you have to repack it carefully. Make sure the kraut is packed tight in the crock, the surface is level, and the cover and weight are clean. Sometimes brine evaporates, so if the kraut is not submerged below brine just add salted water as necessary. Some people preserve kraut by canning and heat-processing it. This can be done; but so much of the power of sauerkraut is its aliveness that I wonder: Why kill it?

10. Develop a rhythm. I try to start a new batch before the previous batch runs out. I remove the remaining kraut from the crock, repack it with fresh salted cabbage, then pour the old kraut and its juices over the new kraut. This gives the new batch a boost with an active culture starter.

RESOURCES:

<http://www.kitchengardeners.org/sauerkraut.html> (with video)

Wild Fermentation: The Flavor, Nutrition, and Craft of Live-Culture Foods

By Sandor Ellix Katz

The Joy of Pickling: 200 Flavor-packed Recipes for all Kinds of Produce from Garden or Market

By Linda Ziedrich

Keeping Food Fresh: Old World Techniques and Recipes

By The Gardeners and Farmers of Terre Vivante