

KOMBUCHA

Makes 1 gallon

3 quarts filtered water

1 cup sugar

1 teaspoon sea salt (optional)

4 tea bags of black tea

1/2 cup kombucha from a previous culture

OR *1/4 cup raw apple cider vinegar*

1 kombucha mushroom (see Sources)

Directions

Bring 3 quarts filtered water to boil. Add sugar and optional~ salt and simmer until dissolved. Remove from heat, add the tea bags and allow the tea to steep until water has completely cooled. Remove tea bags. Pour cooled liquid into a 4-quart pyrex bowl and add 1/2 cup kombucha from previous batch. Place the mushroom on top of the liquid. Make a crisscross over the bowl with masking tape, cover loosely with a cloth or towel and transfer to a warm, dark place, away from contaminants and insects. In about 7 to 10 days the kombucha will be ready, depending on the temperature. It should be fizzy and rather sour, with no taste of tea remaining. Transfer to covered glass containers and store in the refrigerator. (Always wash your 4-quart pyrex kombucha bowls with mild soap—not in the dishwasher.)

When the kombucha is ready, your mushroom will have grown a second spongy pancake. This can be used to make other batches or given away to friends. Store fresh mushrooms in the refrigerator in a glass or stainless steel container—never plastic. A kombucha mushroom can be used dozens of times. If it begins to turn black, or if the resulting kombucha doesn't sour properly, it's a sign that the culture has become contaminated. When this happens, it's best to throw away all your mushrooms and order a new clean one.

(Possible better option is to warm the water in the afternoon or evening and allow to steep for 12-24 hours, then add sugar and starter.)

Note: White sugar, rather than honey or sucanat, and black tea, rather than flavored teas, give the highest amounts of glucuronic acid.

A word of caution: In general, individuals with yeast allergies tolerate kombucha very well; but we know of one case in which it provoked a severe reaction. If you have yeast allergies, start with a small taste to observe any adverse effects.

Points to remember

- Kombucha can leach minerals from the materials it contacts. It is best to only ferment in glass. For those items it contacts for only a brief time, stainless steel and plastic items may be used (e.g. stainless or plastic spoons for transferring the mushroom, stainless tea strainer, plastic funnel, etc.). Cotton cheesecloth may also be used for straining, but do NOT mix it with cheesecloth used for milk products.

- If you are using filtered water, you may brew your tea at room temperature overnight or for several hours. If your water is chlorinated, boil the water and brew your tea normally or heat it slightly and allow the chlorine to outgas for several hours while brewing the tea.
- Black tea and white sugar are the ideal combination to keep the Kombucha mushroom happiest. Green and white teas will work well after you have experience fermenting black tea. Evaporated cane crystals will also work okay, but the mushrooms formed will probably be very thin and unwilling to separate from their mother. Remember that the sugar is the food for the mushroom, not for you. Most of the sugar will be converted by the yeasts and bacteria. Allowing the Kombucha to ferment longer than seven days will make it more vinegary and less sugary.
- The optimal temperature range for Kombucha fermentation is 72 to 82 degrees. If your house is warmer than that in the summer, check your tea after six days to see if it is ready (you can use a straw to sip some without disturbing the mushroom). In the winter you may use a box and nightlight(s) on an extension cord as an incubator or you may place your fermentation jar on a heating pad set on "low" to keep it at a proper temperature. If the temperature in your house is close to 72, it may take up to 10 days to ferment your tea.
- The Kombucha fermenting jar is to be covered with a paper towel, coffee filter or loosely woven cotton cloth with a rubber band to hold it in place. Place the jar out of direct sunlight. Darkness is not necessary.
- During the fermentation process, yellowish or whitish spots will begin to form on the surface. This will congeal into a new mushroom, which will look like a whitish pancake. Many people mistake the early spots on the surface as mold.
- If your last batch of Kombucha tea is used, you can proceed to make a new batch as long as your mushroom is healthy. Substitute 1/8 to 1/4 cup of raw, unfiltered apple cider vinegar for the 1/2 cup Kombucha tea in the Nourishing Traditions recipe.

Caution

There are several ways to damage or kill the Kombucha mushroom: 1. Using chlorinated water; 2. Not allowing heated water/tea to cool to room temperature before introducing the Kombucha mushroom; 3. Using honey as the sugar source for the solution (brown sugar and molasses are also reported to cause problems); and 4. Smoking tobacco products in the vicinity of the Kombucha mushroom.

Additional information may be obtained from Kombucha America at www.earthcalls.com/kombucha