

The beginner's guide
to making natural,
non-alcoholic
fermented drinks

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INTRODUCTION

I received my first scoby (symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast) for my 30th birthday and I was overcome with excitement. This was a familiar feeling: it arises each time I'm convinced that something (an encounter with an awesome person, a new article of clothing, a book or an amazing shampoo) will change my life profoundly or even shake the foundations of my very existence. Later that evening, I mused about all the good that would come my way. In my mind's eye, my life was divided into two eras: before scoby and after scoby. Because, if all went well, nothing would ever be the same.

In the meantime, I've fortunately become a bit more realistic; yet, in a sense, the prediction did come true. My life did change because, from that moment on, fermented drinks have had me under their spell. I set to work with the kombucha scoby using the copied instructions that came

with it. When I'd managed to keep my scoby alive for a year, I went looking for water kefir grains. And so, the fermentation jars began to spread throughout my house.

For a long time, because I thought I should keep this obscure hobby to myself, I was careful not to talk about it too much. Gradually, though, people started asking me more and more questions about my fermented brews. In all sorts of roundabout ways, strangers in search of a scoby found their way to me, friends asked if they could make the drinks themselves, and restaurants were interested in putting them on their menus. Since so many people were looking for a healthy alternative to soft drinks or wanted to give up alcohol temporarily or for good, the interest in these naturally fizzy drinks kept growing. And that is how I came to write this book about them. I hope my enthusiasm is infectious and that, after reading this book, you too will start to experiment with the knowledge that I've picked up in recent years. Don't worry if it doesn't always work out: after all, fermentation is a natural process that at times — just like you — dares to be quirky.



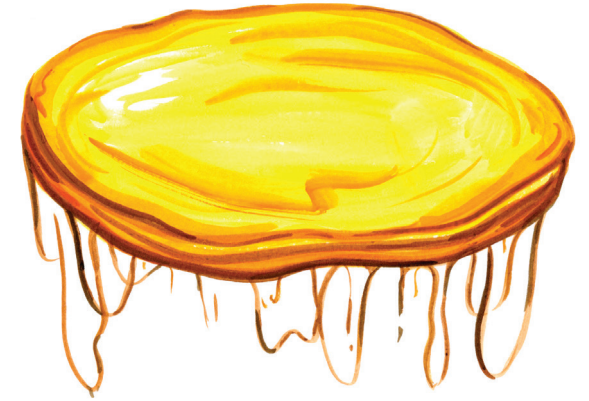
Fizz

Fermentation produces fantastic non-alcoholic drinks: imagine a refreshingly tart kombucha, a thirst-quenching water kefir or an earthy beet kvass, each with a complex and surprising taste and fizz due to their healthy bacteria. They are showing up more and more in restaurants and cocktail bars — but you can easily make them yourself. With their natural effervescence and slightly yeasty flavour, fermented drinks are a fine alternative to wine or beer. Ideal for anyone wanting to consume less alcohol and give their body a probiotic boost.



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KOMBUCHA



The origins of kombucha are shrouded in legend. It is said that Chinese Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi, who reigned over 2000 years ago, was one of the first fans of kombucha. The story goes that the emperor ordered his troops to round up all the doctors in his realm. After imprisoning them, he commanded the doctors to compile a list of all remedies for the most common ailments. When they had completed the task, the emperor asked the assembled physicians to choose one remedy from the list that would guarantee him a long life. The wise ones were unanimous: it had to be kombucha, the tea mushroom culture that holds the promise of eternal life.



BASIC RECIPE

Ingredients for 1 litre:

- 1 kombucha scoby
- 100 ml live kombucha
- 5 g loose leaf black tea (or 3 tea bags)
- 50-100 g unrefined cane sugar (to taste)
- 1 litre filtered water

1 glass jar (1.5 litre capacity)



Milk kefir is said to have originated among shepherds in the Caucasus, an area where Europe and Asia meet. The shepherds made kefir by hanging fresh cow's, goat's or sheep's milk in an open leather bag next to the door. Everyone who entered the house was supposed to hit the bag with a stick to help oxygen circulate and thus get the fermentation going. After two days, the milk would turn refreshingly tart and slightly fizzy, earning it the name 'milk champagne'.

TIPS



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Although the scobys for milk kefir and water kefir look the same, at the microbiological level, they contain different cultures of bacteria and yeasts so you can't use one instead of the other.

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Milk kefir grains love milk that comes from animals. You can use cow's milk, but don't forget that goat's milk and sheep's milk are also perfect for making kefir. Goat's milk produces a slightly thinner kefir than cow's milk. Sheep's milk contains more protein and makes a thicker kefir.

↓
The milk kefir grains are happiest in fresh milk and they don't mind whether it is raw or pasteurised. They are not crazy about long life milk, also called UHT, as it has been heated to an Ultra High Temperature. If you use raw milk, make sure it's as fresh as possible, otherwise too many bacteria will have already developed in the milk and they will compete with the milk kefir bacteria.

↓
Non-dairy milk is not easy to ferment with milk kefir grains, as they need lactose to thrive. You can certainly experiment with plant-based milk, but the results may not be consistent. Coconut milk is a good bet. It sometimes takes longer to ferment — you will need 2-3 days to obtain a refreshing drink. Taste it regularly until you are happy with it. After brewing two or three batches of coconut milk kefir you'll need to soak the grains in animal milk again so that they can feed.

↓
If you let the kefir ferment for too long, it will separate into curds (solids) and whey (liquid), which makes it more difficult to strain the kefir grains from the kefir. If this happens, you're more likely to succeed if you shake the kefir well so that the liquid and solids recombine. Try using a sieve and, if this doesn't work, fish the grains out with your — freshly washed — hands.

↓
If you want to take a break from your brewing rhythm, you can store the grains in their favourite food — milk — in the fridge for up to three weeks. You'll need 1 litre of milk to keep them well nourished for this amount of time.

By the beginning of the 19th century, nearly every city in England had a ginger beer brewery. Street vendors sold the drink, dispensing it from a mechanical beer tap in a cart drawn by a donkey or pony. From 1855 onwards, British excise laws set a limit of 2% alcohol for ginger beer and the drink also became popular for children. During Prohibition in the United States, from 1920 to 1933, imports from England rose: ginger beer was not only a fine alternative to real beer, it was also an ideal mixer to disguise the bad taste of bootleg alcohol from home stills.

Today, commercial ginger beer is no longer brewed or fermented: it is just a soft drink made from water, ginger, sugar, and carbon dioxide (CO₂). This means that now the only difference between ginger beer and ginger ale is that ginger beer has more of a tang because it contains more ginger. In this chapter, we return to its roots with a fermented version.



METHOD



1. Make a starter by mixing 2 tablespoons of coarsely grated ginger with 2 tablespoons of sugar and 800 ml of water in a glass jar. Stir well with a wooden spoon. Put the starter in a warm place and stir frequently. Every day add 1 tablespoon grated ginger and 1 tablespoon sugar until the starter starts to fizz. The process may take only a couple of days but sometimes you have to be more patient.



2. Once your starter is showing signs of life, make the ginger tea. Slice the ginger finely, add it to 4 litres of the filtered water and boil, covered, for 15 minutes. Add the sugar and stir well. Dilute the strong ginger tea with the remaining 4 litres of filtered water so that the liquid cools more quickly. Let it cool to body temperature. Transfer the tea into the large glass container.



For centuries, Mexico has been a paradise for anyone who likes fermented drinks. Pulque is made from fermented agave juice and tejuino and pozol from the dough used to make corn tortillas and tamales. But the most popular drink by far is tepache, which was initially also made from maize.

In fact, the name tepache comes from *tepiātl*, a Nahuatl word meaning 'drink made from maize'. The Nahuatl, the original inhabitants of Central Mexico, were already brewing this fermented soft drink in pre-Hispanic times.

Later, the maize was replaced by fruits such as pineapple, apple, and orange. The fruit rind and pulp ferment in water with brown sugar and seasonings, traditionally in a wooden cask. To this day, tepache is very popular in Mexico, sold there by street vendors, and its alcohol content is regularly given a boost by mixing it with beer.

FOR STARTERS



For the basic recipe I chose a version using apple, a fruit plentiful in our temperate part of the world. Of course, you can also make the popular version with pineapple: you'll find that recipe further on. It's ideal to start this apple tepache when you are making apple sauce or apple pie.

The peel and cores that you would normally throw away get a second life as a fragrant soft drink.





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COCKTAILS

The refreshing acidity of fermented drinks makes them a perfect ingredient for cocktails. Simply add a shot of your favourite alcoholic drink to your glass of water kefir, kombucha, beet kvass, or ginger beer and voila! — you have an elegant long drink in your hands. Ideal for when guests drop in or for moments when you are in need of something a little stronger.

In this chapter, we give you some extra ideas to bring out your inner mixologist as you experiment with your new collection of fermented brews. Let's just call it retox after detox.

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Each with a complex and surprising taste and fizz due to their healthy bacteria.

With their natural effervescence and slightly yeasty flavour, fermented drinks are a fine alternative to wine or beer.

This book tells you everything you need to know to brew these healthy, alcohol-free beverages yourself. You'll find user-friendly recipes with step-by-step illustrations, bite-sized nuggets on the science of the fermentation process, and juicy anecdotes about the origin of these remarkable drinks.

Fizz is a collaboration between food writer Barbara Serulus and illustrator-chef Elise van Iterson.

