



## Fermented Foods Revival Rediscover Probiotic-Rich Foods

by Judith Fertig

Colorful jars of fermented Korean kimchee, Indian chutney, German sauerkraut and bottles of kombucha line many grocery store shelves today. We're in the midst of a fermented food revival.

### Grassroots Groundswell

"I grew up in New York City as the grandson of immigrants from Belarus, and sauerkraut and pickles were common foods I always loved, but neither my grandparents nor anyone else I knew made them," says Sandor Katz. This Woodbury, Tennessee, writer who travels the world giving related workshops is credited with bringing fermented foods back into the limelight. He explains, "I am self-taught and learned to ferment by experimentation. It was that first successful batch of sauerkraut that sparked my obsession.

I also love eating cheese, beer, chocolate, coffee, yogurt and many other products of fermentation."

Kirsten and Christopher Shockey, the authors of *Fermented Vegetables: Creative Recipes for Fermenting 64 Vegetables & Herbs in Krauts, Kimchis, Brined Pickles, Chutneys, Relishes & Pastes*, homestead in Oregon's Jackson Valley. "A fateful Christmas gift—a ceramic crock full of bubbling, fermenting cabbage under the tree, funky fermenty smell and all," first piqued their interest, Kirsten recalls. "Eventually, we started our own small farmstead



*Fermented Chopped Salad, recipe page 44.*

fermentation company.” Christopher explains that the combination of salt and shredded or chopped vegetables can launch the production of probiotic lactic acid bacteria that preserves the food and drives off “bad bacteria”.

Jennifer McGruther, who lives in the Pacific Northwest, is the author of *The Nourished Kitchen* cookbook, an offshoot of her blog of the same name. Her first batch of fermented food was yogurt. Now she visits her local farmers’ market every Saturday before spending Sunday prepping foods for the rest of the week. “Traditional foods like fermented vegetables, yogurt or kombucha don’t take long to prepare; they take time to culture, but it’s so rewarding,” she says.

### How Much Is Enough?

Fermented foods offer a variety of positive effects on health. “If you’re consuming a diet rich in fermented foods, you’re essentially bathing your GI tract in healthy, food-related organisms,” says food research scientist Robert Hutkins, Ph.D., a professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Fermented foods with live probiotics can also improve brain function, according to a study in the journal *Gastroenterology*.

Fermented foods are meant to be eaten as condiments, not consumed in large quantities. Overdoing such intake might cause bloating, cramping and other digestion problems. Dr. Leonard Smith, a gastrointestinal and vascular surgeon and medical advisor for the University of Miami Department of Integrative Medicine, recommends “a half-cup of cultured vegetables or two ounces of your favorite probiotic liquid per day to start.” He says it’s possible to eventually work up to having a serving of cultured vegetables and probiotic liquids at every meal, or possibly as a between-meal snack.

Christopher Shockey adds, “We don’t see these foods as a ‘medicine’ to be eaten daily because you have to force yourself; instead, we see it as a fun, delicious, easy, healthful addition to mealtime.”

*Judith Fertig writes cookbooks and foodie fiction from Overland Park, KS (JudithFertig.com).*

## A FEW FERMENTED RECIPES TO START

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“Fermented foods are well known for building gut health. Now a growing body of research shows that they improve immunity, brain and heart functions,” says Michelle Schoffro Cook, Ph.D. The board-certified doctor of natural medicine, certified herbalist and author blogs from Vancouver, Canada.

Get started with these simple, plant-based recipes from her latest book, *The Cultured Cook: Delicious Fermented Foods with Probiotics to Knock Out Inflammation, Boost Gut Health, Lose Weight & Extend Your Life*.

### Salvadoran Salsa

Yields: about 1 quart

This gingery and spicy salsa, also known as *curtido*, is a traditional Salvadoran food. The twist here is added turmeric and green apple. Serve on its own, as a condiment with chips, on sausages or over salad. Maybe mix a couple of heaping spoonfuls with freshly mashed avocado for a fresh take on guacamole.

- 1/2 green cabbage
- 1 to 2 carrots
- 1 green apple, cored and quartered
- One 2-inch piece fresh ginger
- 1/2 cayenne chili
- 1/2 small purple or red onion
- One 2-inch piece fresh turmeric
- 3 Tbsp unrefined fine or 6 Tbsp unrefined coarse sea salt
- 1 quart (or liter) filtered water

Use a food processor with a coarse grating blade to shred the cabbage, carrots, apple, ginger, chili, onion and turmeric. (Consider wearing food-safe gloves to avoid touching the chili.)

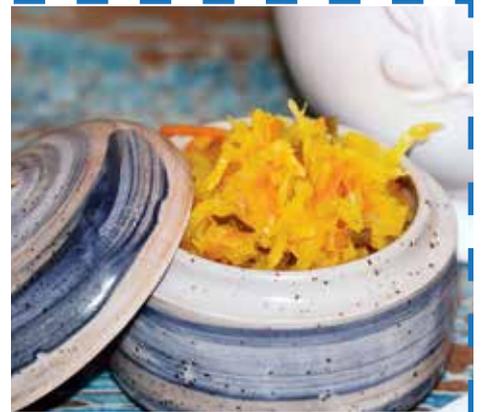
Transfer to a crock or a large glass or ceramic bowl, and mix well.

In a pitcher or large measuring cup, dissolve the salt in the water, stirring if necessary to dissolve the salt. Pour the saltwater over the salsa mixture until all ingredients are submerged, leaving a couple of inches at the top for expansion.

Place a snug-fitting plate inside the crock or bowl over the salsa-water mixture; then weigh it down with food-safe weights or a bowl or jar of water, so the vegetables remain submerged under the brine as they ferment. Cover with a lid or a cloth, and allow it to ferment five to seven days, checking periodically to ensure the salsa is still submerged below the water line.

If any mold forms on the surface, simply scoop it out. It won’t spoil the salsa unless it gets deeper inside the crock. (It may form where the mixture meets the air, but it rarely forms deeper.)

After one week, put the salsa in jars or a bowl, cover and place in the fridge, where it usually lasts up to a year.



*Natural Awakenings* recommends using organic, non-GMO (genetically modified) and non-bromated ingredients whenever possible.

## Fermented Chopped Salad

Yields: about 6 cups

Unlike other salads, this version stores for many months in the fridge. Serve on its own or toss it in vinaigrette and serve over brown rice for a quick and nutritious rice bowl dinner.

- 1 radish, finely chopped
- 1/2 small onion, finely chopped
- 1 turnip, chopped into 1/2-inch chunks
- 1 carrot, chopped into 1/2-inch chunks
- 3 small apples, chopped into 1/2-inch chunks
- Handful of green beans, cut into 1-inch lengths
- 1 rutabaga, chopped into 1/2-inch chunks
- 1 to 2 grape leaves, kale leaves or other large leafy greens (optional)
- 3 Tbsp unrefined fine or 6 Tbsp unrefined coarse sea salt
- 1 quart (or liter) filtered water

In a medium bowl, mix the radish, onion, turnip, carrot, apples, green beans and rutabaga; then transfer to a small crock.

Place the grape leaves or other leafy greens on top of the chopped ingredients to help hold them under the brine; then weigh the mix down with food-safe weights or a jar or bowl of water.

In a pitcher or large measuring cup, dissolve the salt in the water, stirring if necessary to dissolve the salt.

Pour the brine over the salad, cover with a lid or cloth, and let ferment for one week.

Remove the covering, weights and grape leaves or other leafy greens.

Dish out into jars or a bowl, cover and refrigerate, where the salad should last six to 12 months.

*Recipes and photos are courtesy of Michelle Schoffro Cook and New World Library; visit [DrMichelleCook.com](http://DrMichelleCook.com).*

## Vegan Kefir

Yields: about 1 quart

Traditional kefir is made with cow's milk, but can be made with plant-based milks like cashew, almond, sunflower seed or coconut. The sweetener feeds the kefir microbes, leaving minimal sugar in the end product. The grains will grow over time; only about one tablespoon of kefir grains is needed to keep the kefir going; remove the extras to eat, give to friends or add to compost.

- 1 quart (or liter) filtered water
- 1/2 cup raw, unsalted cashews
- 1 tsp coconut sugar, pure maple syrup or agave nectar
- 1 Tbsp kefir grains (a natural starter, available at health food stores and online)
- Mandarin sections for garnish (optional)

Use a blender to blend the water, cashews and coconut sugar (or maple syrup or agave nectar) until it's smooth and creamy.

Pour the cashew milk into a 1 1/2- to 2-quart glass jar, making sure it is less than two-thirds full. Add the kefir grains, stir and then place the cap on the jar.

Leave the jar at room temperature for 24 to 48 hours, gently shaking it periodically.

The cashew milk will become somewhat bubbly, then will begin to coagulate and separate; shake it to remix the kefir or scoop out the thicker curds and use them like soft cheese or sour cream.

Refrigerate up to one week. When ready to serve, pour the kefir into a glass and garnish the rim with mandarin orange sections, if desired.