

◆ The GreenLife Project ◆

Fermentation Basics

Two ingredients. A jar. Time. The oldest preservation method on earth.

What Is It?

Lacto-fermentation uses salt to create an environment where beneficial *Lactobacillus* bacteria thrive, producing lactic acid that preserves food and creates that signature tang.

Why It Works

Salt draws water from vegetables, forming a natural brine. Submerged with no oxygen, good bacteria flourish and bad bacteria cannot survive. No vinegar, no heat, no canning needed.

What You Get

Food that keeps for months, tastes better than fresh, and is rich in beneficial probiotics. Sauerkraut, kimchi, pickles — all begin exactly the same way.

Classic Sauerkraut

Makes 1 quart · Prep: 20 minutes · Ferment: 1 – 4 weeks

INGREDIENTS

- 1 medium head green cabbage (~2 lbs)
- 1 tablespoon non-iodized salt
sea salt or kosher — not table salt
- *Optional additions:*
- 1 tsp caraway seeds
- 2–3 juniper berries
- 1–2 cloves garlic, sliced thin

EQUIPMENT

- Wide-mouth quart jar
- Large mixing bowl
- Sharp knife + cutting board
- Wooden spoon or fist (to pack)
- Small zip-lock bag (brine weight)
- Cloth or loose lid to cover

1 Shred the cabbage

Remove outer leaves and set one aside. Quarter, core, and slice cabbage as thinly as possible — coin thickness is ideal.

2 Salt and massage

Place shreds in a large bowl. Add 1 tablespoon salt. Massage and squeeze firmly for 5–10 minutes until the cabbage releases plenty of liquid and feels soft and juicy. This liquid is your brine.

3 Check the salt

The cabbage should taste pleasantly salty — like a well-seasoned salad. Too bland: add a pinch more and massage again. Too salty: rinse lightly.

4 Pack the jar

Pack tightly into a clean quart jar, pressing down firmly after each handful so brine rises above the cabbage. Leave 1–2 inches of headspace. Cabbage must stay fully submerged.

5 Weigh it down

Lay the reserved outer cabbage leaf over the shreds. Set a small zip-lock bag filled with brine (1 tsp salt + 1 cup water) on top as a weight. This keeps everything below the brine.

6 Cover and ferment

Cover loosely — gas must escape. Store at room temperature (65–75°F), away from direct sunlight. Press down daily if cabbage rises above the brine.

7 Taste as it develops

Begin tasting at day 5. At 1 week: mild and lightly tangy. At 2–4 weeks: deeper, more complex. Ferment to your taste — there is no wrong answer.

8 Seal and refrigerate

When it tastes right, seal the jar and move it to the refrigerator. Cold stops fermentation. It keeps 6 months or more — though it rarely lasts that long.

The Salt Rule

2% salt by weight

Weigh cabbage · multiply by 0.02
= exact grams of salt needed
Example: 900g cabbage = 18g salt

Troubleshooting

White film on top:

Harmless kahm yeast — skim off

Not enough brine:

Add 1 tsp salt dissolved in 1 cup water

Smells putrid (not just sour):

Discard and start again

Try Next

- Kimchi — chili, ginger & garlic
- Curtido — Salvadoran slaw + oregano
- Fermented hot sauce — peppers + garlic
- Dilly beans — whole green beans + dill