



## How to Make Sauerkraut

**The beauty of homemade sauerkraut is its simplicity.**

Use up excess cabbage by making your own sauerkraut.

Making sauerkraut is an excellent way to utilize a bountiful cabbage harvest. This autumn tradition, passed down through generations, is very simple and, like all live-cultured foods, is very beneficial.

“We all need live nutrition,” says Sandor Ellix Katz, author of *Wild Fermentation: The Flavor, Nutrition, and Craft of Live-Culture Foods* (Chelsea Green Publishing Group, 2003). “Our digestion relies upon the activity of bacteria inside our bodies.”

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“It doesn’t require sophistication at all,” says Katz. “That’s one of the misconceptions: That it requires scientific precision.”

Specialized, fermenting crocks are available, but sauerkraut can be made in nearly any food-grade glass or plastic cylinders. Katz prefers glass and makes sauerkraut in a quart-sized canning or mayonnaise jar for demonstrations.

For 1 gallon of sauerkraut, use approximately 5 pounds of cabbage and 3 tablespoons of sea or pickling salt. Do not use iodized salt as it inhibits fermentation.

Shred the cabbage to the preferred level of coarseness. Pack a layer in the container and sprinkle with a little salt. Tamp each layer firmly to press water out of the cabbage. Continue until the container is filled to within 1 inch of the top.

Fermenting crocks typically come with stones to weight down the sauerkraut. If you’re using a different container, place a plate over the top of the cabbage to compress it. A jug or jar filled with water works well as a weight. It’s fine if the cover doesn’t fit edge to edge within the container because the brine will cover the fermenting cabbage.

The most critical aspect of making sauerkraut is the brine.

“The vegetables have to be submerged under liquid,” Katz notes.

Typically the cabbage and salt combination will produce enough water to form a natural brine, but if the liquid doesn’t rise above the plate or stone level, make a brine by dissolving 1 tablespoon of salt in 1 cup of water.

After the sauerkraut is packed and submerged, replace the lid on the crock or place a cloth over the container and set it in a secluded spot in the kitchen or pantry. Check on it periodically to track progress. Fermentation varies upon temperature and how much salt was used. The hotter the weather or the less salt used, the more quickly the sauerkraut will be ready.

“In hot weather it’s very common for surface mold to develop,” says Katz. Simply skim off this “bloom,” which is not harmful because, according to Katz, it’s impossible for food-poisoning organisms to grow in the acidic environment of the fermenting process.

About the Author: Amy Grisak is a freelance writer in Montana. She’s played in the garden for more than 25 years.