

# Healthy Fermented Food Trend Catching on Locally

by Heather Lalley



There's nothing new about fermentation, but this food preservation technique that's been around for thousands of years is winning new fans as more people embrace the health benefits of the probiotic "good bugs" that thrive in fermented fare.

Foods like sauerkraut and kimchi owe their distinctive flavors (not to mention lengthy shelf lives) to the process of lacto-fermentation. Produce is salted to kill any harmful bacteria, allowing gut health-boosting bugs like lactobacillus to flourish. Many fermented foods are raw, and proponents say, packed with nutrients that would otherwise get destroyed via pasteurization, canning and similar techniques. Other popular fermented foods are tempeh and kombucha.

"Our bodies are craving it, quite frankly," says Mara King, owner of the Boulder, Colorado-based pickling business Ozuke ([Ozuke.com](http://Ozuke.com)). "A lot of people are craving these foods and looking for them, almost out of desperation."

King, whose company name means "the best pickled things" in Japanese, started the business five years ago after working as head chef in several Colorado sushi restaurants. Ozuke



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grew 100 percent year-over-year for the first four years. She sells roughly 2,000 cases per month of fermented creations such as citrus-ginger sauerkraut, gingery kimchi and garlic-packed pickled beets. "This is a process of making food that actually makes it safer," says King.

Another benefit of fermented foods is that it's the perfect way to preserve locally grown produce. That's one of the missions of The Brinery ([TheBrinery.com](http://TheBrinery.com)), a quickly growing fermented foods business in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Last year, the Brinery preserved about 175,000 pounds of local produce, says David Klingenberg, owner and "chief fermenting officer".

Klingenberg became interested in food preservation and fermenting about 16 years ago while working on a farm. He said he's experienced improved energy and better digestion, among other benefits, over his years of daily consumption of fermented foods. "You get some super powers," he says. "You get a healthy vibrance on a cellular level. It's linked to cancer fighting, to digestion, to happiness."

Fermented foods like sauerkraut and kimchi are fun and easy to make

at home. Recipes abound online, but the most basic involve simply massaging cut cabbage with a bit of salt until it releases liquid. The resulting mixture is left to sit and ferment for days or weeks. Experts recommend tasting these creations along the way to see how the flavors evolve. Refrigeration will slow the fermentation process.

Most importantly, don't be afraid to try fermented foods, says Andrew Sauter Sargent, owner of Spirit Creek Farm, in northern Wisconsin. Sauter Sargent calls his business "your basic local, organic, probiotic, live, raw, vegan, gluten-free, Northern-most Wisconsin-based, family-owned, lacto-fermented sauerkraut, kimchi and other fermented food producer."

He says, "There's never been a reported case of food-borne illness from fermented foods. That's a pretty amazing claim. You're making foods safer by increasing the pH. You're killing all these bacteria. You're doing something to make it better."

When it comes to eating these fermented foods, it's best to think of them as condiments or side dishes. That way, it's easy to add them to everyday meals without relying on special recipes. Sauter Sargent adds some to his eggs for breakfast. For lunch, he often has a kimchi quesadilla, and for dinner, he likes a side of fermented green beans or beets.

King says, "Americans think in terms of recipes and dishes. You need to have an Asian approach to eating, of shared foods served family-style." She likes to mix kimchi with her rice or meat, use it as a sandwich spread or with a stir fry or soup. "When you first start eating fermented foods, it's very physically compelling," she says. "You start to crave it. You start to want more. I eat them every day."



Spirit Creek and The Brinery products are available at many local outlets, including most area Whole Foods Market stores, Dill Pickle Co-op, in Chicago, Sugar Beet Co-Op, in Oak Park, Local Foods, in Chicago, and Standard Markets, in Naperville and Westmont. Ozuke products are available online and in several WI locations, and plan to enter the Chicago market soon. Visit their websites for a full list of retail outlets.

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## Fermented Tomato Salsa



Yield: depends on amount of produce used

This is a simple recipe, and one that has a lot of flexibility, too. It can be spicy or mild, red or green (tomatillos), garlicky or garlic-free.

2.5 to 3 lb tomatoes  
1 or 2 yellow, white or red onions  
½ cup or more fresh cilantro  
1 lemon, juiced  
2 or 3 limes, juiced  
2 Tbsp Celtic salt  
Salt and pepper to taste (cumin, oregano or powdered chili optional)  
Sweet or spicy peppers

Chop tomatoes, peppers, onion, cilantro and (optional) garlic. Toss all ingredients into large bowl and add the citrus juice. Add salt, pepper and other spices and pour into quart or half-gallon mason jars and cap. Leave on the counter for approximately two days. After fermentation is complete, store in refrigerator for up to nine months.

Recipe courtesy of Ozuke.

# Spicy Turmeric Fermented Kraut

by Mary Krystinak

Fermented foods, such as sauerkraut, tempeh, miso, kefir, kombucha and kimchi, contain good bacteria that provide a healthy dose of probiotics to aid digestion. This easy recipe for kraut tastes great and also contains turmeric, a bright yellow spice long used in Asian cultures and known to have anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties.

## Ingredients

2 regular-sized heads green cabbage (about 2 pounds each)  
4 Tbsp sea salt  
2 cups sliced onions  
2 cups grated carrots  
4 Tbsp grated fresh ginger  
4 garlic cloves, minced  
2 lemons, thinly sliced  
4 tsp red chili flakes  
4 Tbsp turmeric  
1 Tbsp crushed coriander

## Supplies

Wide-mouth quart or half-gallon mason jars, or a ceramic crock  
Fermentation cap (such as Pickle Pipes or Kraut Kaps)  
Glass weights (or something to keep veggies submerged below brine)

## Instructions

Mix spices and salt and set aside. This mixture will be sprinkled on the veggies after they are sliced and put into a large container for later mixing. This allows for even distribution and starts to draw out the moisture from the veggies.

Remove the outer leaves of the cabbage. Save these clean leaves if using a large crock for your fermentation. This acts as a natural barrier and cover. Quarter cabbage and remove hard core. Thinly slice the cabbage with a knife or with a mandolin.

Peel onion, cut in half and thinly slice into half-moons.

Scrub lemons, cut in half and thinly slice into half-moons.



Be sure that all the above produce is sliced approximately the same thickness so that they will ferment evenly.

Grate carrots coarsely to match thickness of above veggies.

As each veggie is prepared, store in a separate bowl. When all are sliced, begin combining into a large container (a big stock pot works well) by sprinkling in a handful of each veggie, then layer with some of the spice/salt mixture. Massage this layer well by hand. (Wear gloves to prevent hands from being stained.) Repeat until all the veggies are combined. Do a final mix and keep massaging the veggies.

Cover with a towel and let sit for 1 hour to allow for maceration (the drawing out of water).

Pack tightly into clean fermentation jars or crock. The mixture will now have some brine forming. Press down with a wooden tamper or spoon after each cup is added, to draw out more brine. Press to extract liquid and top with weights to keep mixture submerged below brine. Cover with fermentation cap. Keep in a cool place out of sun. Check daily to be sure veggies stay submerged below brine.

Allow mixture to ferment at least 2 weeks, or up to 4. Repack into smaller glass jars and keep in the refrigerator for up to 6 months.



Mary Krystinak teaches sustainable living skills, such as baking, pickling, canning and fermenting, through Mary's Wholesome Living. For more information, call 630-776-

4604, email [WholesomeMary@att.net](mailto:WholesomeMary@att.net) or visit [MarysWholesomeLiving.com](http://MarysWholesomeLiving.com). See listing, page 44.