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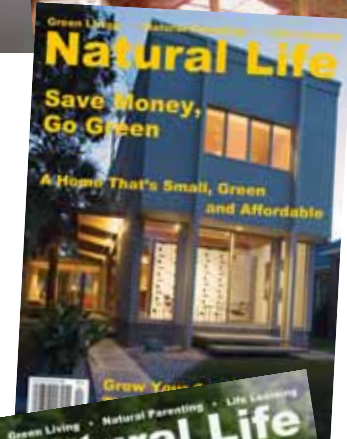
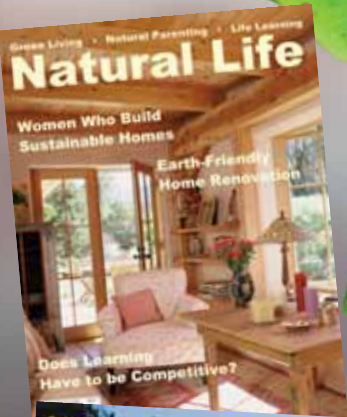
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Make Sauerkraut in Your Kitchen

Very often, sauerkraut in grocery aisles is pasteurized or heavily refrigerated. While this lets the sauerkraut keep on the shelf almost indefinitely, it also means that the health benefits of the live bacteria that transformed that cabbage are lost. Fermentation needs a nurturing hand – and the large-scale manufacturer doesn't have one.

Making your own small batches of sauerkraut at home means that you can take advantage of a little extra cabbage and still have it in a quantity that can be stored without having to can it.

The process for making sauerkraut is almost ridiculously simple – just shred, salt, and submerge. The lacto-bacteria present in the cabbage do the rest.

- 1 head green cabbage
- 2 to 3 tbsp. table salt
- 2 L crock or jar, with an air-tight lid

Sterilize crock or jar and utensils in hot boiling water for 10 minutes and dry thoroughly.

Remove outer cabbage leaves, quarter and cut out tough core. Rinse cabbage and dry well. Using very sharp knife or slicer, finely shred cabbage and set aside.

Layer 2 to 3 centimeters (1 inch) of cabbage, sprinkle with a teaspoon. of salt – repeat until cabbage is finished. As you work,

press down firmly on each new layer to remove as much air as possible, as the salt draws out the brine from the cabbage – a potato masher (sterilized) can work well. Once you are finished with your cabbage, you should have enough brine to cover the cabbage by several centimeters. If you do not, let it sit for a few hours – if still not enough, you can mix up some extra brine with one teaspoon of salt to each cup of water to cover.



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Lacto-fermentation takes place without air – you need to protect the cabbage from being exposed to air during the process to avoid spoilage. Take a small plate (or any flat non-metal object like a plastic lid) and place on top of the cabbage. To weigh the plate down, fill a plastic sandwich bag with brine, pie weights, or even some clean stones – just be sure that you leave nothing metal in contact with the brine.

Close the jar or crock. Then, find a warm spot where your jar will be safe from curious hands and jostling, and wait. If you're using a jar, you should also keep it in a fairly dark place.

Within a day or so, you'll probably notice some bubbles beginning – one advantage to using a clear jar is that you can watch the magic happen. Every day, you can gently push down the plate to release any carbon dioxide bubbles. I've never found that mold grows in my kitchen – maybe because of the small batches. If some mold does grow, just skim it off. After a week or so, you can try giving it a taste – using a very clean wooden spoon scoop a few tablespoons out.

The sauerkraut can be eaten as soon as it is to your taste – the earlier in the process it is, the crunchier and spicier it is. This makes a tasty salad without any further preparation.

The fermentation is completely finished when new bubbles stop forming – usually about three weeks at room temperature. At that point, it may begin to go soft on the countertop – you can refrigerate it or can it in a hot water bath for longer storage if you have any left over.

Once the cabbage is eaten, the leftover brine can be used as a stock base for soups or dressings – some sour-lovers even drink it as a digestive tonic, mixed with water.

Michelle Branco is a freelance writer and blogger at www.mamabear.ca. She blogs about mothering, breastfeeding, product safety and, of course, food. Her much-put-upon family serves as lab assistants, taste testers, and clean-up crew. She is also an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant and when she's not at the keyboard or experimenting in the kitchen, she runs a private lactation consultant practice at Latch Lactation (www.latchlactation.com).

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