

THOUGHT FOR FOOD



Flavour packed Kimchi ready to be eaten. GETTY IMAGES/ ISTOCK

Your jar of goodness

Kimchi, kombucha and all things fermented

■ BY SHAHEEN PEERBHAI

A few summers ago, I attended a workshop that provided an introduction to the process of fermentation. We made our own kimchi within minutes (granted all the chopping and pounding had already been done) and that got me excited about probing further into making my own fermented cabbage.

Around the same time, a Korean friend posted a photo of a massive batch of kimchi she had made. She sent me snapshots of the recipe from *Maangchi's Real Korean Cooking*. It had detailed instructions with step-by-step photos to help any newbie kimchi fiend make their own jar. I salted the cabbage, then rubbed it with a glutinous rice flour-based kimchi paste, packed it tightly into jars and within days had a successfully fermented batch of kimchi made from scratch. It was so good, I'd eat it straight from the jar. Making my own jar also gave me the opportunity to observe the change in flavour from sweet freshness to bubbly acidic.

Lemon and salt

But with fermentation, you sometimes just have to wait a bit longer. Like when you're making preserved lemons; the process is very straightforward: you rub the lemons with coarse sea salt, then pour hot water over it, and put the sealed jar away for at least three months. Slowly, the lemon skin softens and becomes much like nimbu aachaar, except there's no oil here. It's excellent chopped up and thrown into a salad or made into a paste for dips and marinades.

I like that incorporating fermented food in my diet is good for my gut, so I wanted to explore this world of preserving, which although based on ancient techniques is seeing a resurgence lately. So I got my hands on

The Art of Fermentation by Sandor Ellix Katz. This isn't a recipe book, but more a comprehensive guide on the subject. It covers every type of ferment possible, both familiar and foreign, ranging from appam, yoghurt, and cheese to Mexican tepache (fermented pineapple drink), Russian kvass (rye bread drink), Japanese miso (fermented soy bean paste) and Bosnian smerka (juniper drink).

Plenty for all

But what I was most interested in was making my kombucha at home instead of spending £6 on a pretty little bottle at Whole Foods. Kombucha is a fermented tea drink that is made with a special culture called SCOBY (symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast). SCOBY is a thick, beige, flubber-like disc that's placed on top of sweetened tea in a large jar and left to ferment for 7 to 12 days until the SCOBY consumes all the sugar and turns into the magical potion it is touted to be. It can be flavoured endlessly (I've made bergamot, lavender, vanilla and ginger so far) and is my version of enjoying a fizzy drink without having to pile on excess sugar (the SCOBY consumes most of it).

Right now, aside from water, my liquid consumption is divided between the probiotic-rich kombucha and the fermented milk called kefir. A friend recently shared some kefir starter grains with a warning to make plans to manage all the excess grains I'd end up with as they'd multiply themselves once I began actively fermenting milk to make kefir. Next on my fermenting agenda: umeboshi, just as soon as I can find ume fruit and *Preserving the Japanese Way* comes through the post.

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