

Kombucha Step-by-Step Guide

Thank you for purchase and welcome to the kombucha family! You are now part of a world-wide community that has sustained this delicious health- promoting drink for many centuries.

Most fermentations, including kombucha, do not do particularly well with metal utensils or metal containers which can damage them.

It is recommended to stick with **glass, wood and plastic** when handling and fermenting. **Stainless steel** is considered safe for *short term* contact such as straining or stirring.

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PREPARATION



*When your package arrives, we recommend putting the **scoby** in a cool cabinet, until you're ready to feed it. Fridge storage is not advised. Kombucha scobies can last quite awhile, but are best within a few months. We still recommend starting as soon as you can, since it will be at it's freshest when it arrives.

Utensils needed:

- Quart or larger jar
- Wood or plastic spoon/spatula
- Plastic/nylon or stainless steel strainer
- Another quart-size or larger container to store the finished drink. (a clean pop, juice, vinegar or oil bottle works great, too).
- For these items and other personally recommended products, view our [Kombucha Recommendations](#) page.

Ingredients needed:

- **Mushroom & Starter Tea:** This refers to the kombucha mushroom (also called a 'scoby' or 'mother') that you received, along with the liquid in the bag it is submerged in. Don't toss the liquid, the liquid is the 'starter tea'.
- **Water:** One quart (4 cups) of water. Non or low-chlorinated, spring and/or filtered water is preferable.*

*For most ferments, a more mineral-rich water is preferred, but when working with kombucha it is actually better to use really pure (ie, filtered), low-mineral water (helps it from getting really yeasty and off-balance). Filtering (such as Brita) either your tap or store-bought spring water is ideal.

Tap water *can* work fine if the chlorine level is low enough. Boiling helps remove a good amount of the chlorine, and most people have no issues using it. If you're concerned, letting it sit out (open, no lid) 24 hours before working with it also allows chlorine to evaporate. Chloramine (another form of chlorine sometimes used to treat water) does not evaporate though. If concerned, call your local water plant and ask. This is usually not an issue, though.

We recommend starting out with spring or filtered water and then testing with new back-up scobies later with other types if you desire.

NOTE on Other Liquids: Hold off on experimenting with other liquids such as **juice** or **coconut water** until you have plenty of back-up. Kombucha can behave very strangely with anything but it's normal recipe, but it can be fun to experiment (just do it later).

- **Sugar:** White, or organic cane sugar* (as in organic white). About 1/4 cup - 1/3 cup total (4-6 tablespoons) total.

*Brown sugar can be problematic for kombucha. Refined white sugar always works best for kombucha, especially at the start. Brown sugar includes any and all kinds of sugar that are not white/clear. If you prefer to work with less refined sugar, we recommend to try that later, once you have a happy scoby making more 'baby scobies' that you can experiment with.

To familiarize yourself more with all the kinds of sugars available, read our section on [sugar types](#) in our Water Kefir FAQ (also applies to kombucha as it just discusses types of sugar on the market).

- **Tea:** Green or Black tea (the regular, caffeinated* kind, most any brand will do).

*Do not use de-caffeinated. Green and Black are the 'default' types that should be used to begin with. Just look for a box labeled simply green tea or black tea at your store (also, don't get any flavored mixes like green tea melon etc). These kinds of teas often have oils in them (which is another issue). Oil will rise to the top and cut off the supply of air to the Kombucha. There are some other options you can try later on (like rooibos or white tea), once the scoby is strong and producing 'baby scobies' that you can experiment with.

In fact there are hundreds of subcategory options of teas (especially loose leaf, online or at your local health food store) just within green and black tea (like sencha or gunpowder etc) but start with something simple unless you are already completely familiar with these.



STEPS

1. Boil 4 cups (1 quart) of water (please see ingredient notes above for what kind to use) for about 5 minutes to remove impurities. If your trying to remove chlorine, you can boil the water for about 10 minutes. Another option is to let the water sit in an open container overnight - this will allow much of the chlorine to evaporate to acceptable levels. A small amount of chlorine won't have adverse effects, but it is important to take out as much chlorine as possible.



CHLORINE: Chlorine can damage the scoby or hinder the ferment, which is sometimes found in high amounts in tap. Please refer to the section above on water under 'Ingredients'.



2. Once it is boiling, remove it from the heat, and then add 1/4 to 1/3 cup of sugar (please see ingredient notes above for recommended kind). The reason you remove it from the heat is that the sugar will start to caramelize if it continues to boil.

Stir the sugar into the water with a wooden or plastic spoon until dissolved.

METAL: If using any metal utensils, stainless steel is considered safe for brief contact. A wooden spoon works great for kombucha. Acids from cultures can interact with and leach metals (though mostly through prolonged contact), which could disrupt or harm the scoby.

3. Once the sugar is dissolved, add 2-3 tea bags of either Black or Green tea (please see ingredient notes above for recommended kind). Steep and let sit until it has cooled to room temperature. Remove tea bags.



4. Place your Kombucha mushroom and starter tea (the liquid it was immersed in, in the packaging) in a quart sized or larger glass jar.

5. Add the cooled sweet tea mixture (water, sugar, tea) you just made to the jar. Make sure the tea has cooled to room temperature. Also, make sure to leave at least an inch from the top of the jar to allow the baby mushroom to grow and breath (don't fill to the brim).



6. After all the ingredients are in the jar, you need to cover the top of the jar with a cloth, paper towel or parchment paper held by elastic. This is so the Kombucha can breathe and to make sure nothing can contaminate it.

7. Time to let it rest and do its thing! Find a place for your Kombucha out of direct sunlight. A cupboard is just fine. Make sure not to disturb it. It takes around 5 to 10 days (being shorter in the summer and longer in the winter). You can start tasting it in around 5 days. You can use a straw, but don't drink directly in case the backwash contaminates it. Put the straw half way in and use your finger to block the top off and then pull the straw out and drink the liquid from inside. Brew until you get your desired taste. If it tastes very sweet, it probably needs more time to consume the sugar. The longer you brew it, the more acidic it will taste. It's mostly a matter of preference with how tart and zesty you like it.

Note: The scoby/mushroom can either sink or float depending on many different factors. It doesn't really matter though. After a few days, you should start to see new layer of culture growing at the top surface. That's the start of the new baby scoby and will thicken as time goes on. Usually they don't get that thick unless you let the brew go for a long time - so don't worry if the new scoby is quite thin, it will still work.

8. Once you find your desired taste, remove the old scoby and the newly formed baby scoby. Sometimes they are attached to each other, but you should be able to separate them with clean hands or some gentle tongs. Many times you will see dead yeast strains floating around (not worms!) just strings of yeast). Although harmless, you can strain them out before drinking the kombucha if you wish.

Note: The baby mushroom/scoby will probably be smaller than the mother. That is simply because the mother scoby we sent you was brewed longer to make it bigger and stronger. The baby scoby will still be quite strong enough for brewing, though, despite being thin.

9. Pour most of the finished tea into container(s). Save about 10% (about 1/3-1/2 cup) for your next batch. That is your starter tea. To get the finished tea nice and fizzy, you need to put the finished kombucha tea in a container*, fill it almost to the top and then put a tight lid on it for about 2 to 5 days at room temperature.

*Be careful whenever storing in an air-tight bottle, especially glass, because the pressure can build up and explode the bottle. The best type of bottle is a swingtop bottle, which is built for this purpose. You can 'burp' any container by opening the lid to release the pressure, then sealing it again, to reduce explosion risk.

The finished tea will continue to ferment even without the mushrooms. If you put it into the fridge it will dramatically slow down the process. It will still become fizzy in the fridge though, too.

10. Congratulations on finishing your first home-made Kombucha! Simply repeat the process again for your next batch.

It really is a fool-proof process and the mushrooms are quite resilient, so don't worry too much, people have been making this for centuries! Have fun, experiment and enjoy!

And while you're at it, try your hand at some flavoring!...



Important Note Before Drinking Kombucha:

Kombucha contains very large amounts of good bacteria and yeast as well as being acidic (from the high amounts of healthful lactic acid, pH around 3-5).

For a few people's bodies it can be a little bit of a shock. Everybody reacts to it differently, so we always recommend starting out slow to see how your body takes to it. The majority of people do not have any adverse reaction, but if you do, usually it's just a matter of starting out slow and slowing increasing over time. Start with a tablespoon and go from there. If you are sensitive to sugar and tiny amounts of alcohol, it is generally tolerated better on a full, rather than empty stomach, such as after lunch.

NOTE: When people say they are drinking kombucha, they are referring to the liquid created. However, it is fine to eat small amounts of the scoby itself, too, which is of course an excellent source of probiotics. However, chewing a scoby proves to be quite the task, and most people don't bother. :) It's known that letting a scoby sit out to dry can make a great chew toy for a dog though!

FLAVORING: Half the fun of kombucha is flavoring. When you've got it strained and bottled, you can experiment with many different flavors and techniques. Add in some of your favorite fruit juice, veggie juice, or squeeze in some fresh lemon, lime or orange. You can even add fresh or dried fruit. Raspberries are delicious. A teaspoon of vanilla extract (per 1-2 cups), a stick of cinnamon, or some fresh slices of ginger are excellent as well.

Sometimes this process is called the 'Secondary Ferment' because it is *without* the scoby, where you are adding in more sugar and/or fruit and flavors, and letting it further ferment a day or two. The reason to add more sugar is to aid in carbonation (if necessary, or desired). Fruit juice also works great for adding carbonation (with no need to add extra sugar). You can let it rest at room temperature or in the fridge for this process (just make sure to 'burp' the bottles, especially if left out of the fridge. For special bottles like the one above (which don't explode as easily as normal jars and bottles), view our [swingtop bottle page](#).

If you need any further help beyond this guide, feel free to email us at any time at yemoos@yahoo.com.

Additional Thoughts & Tips

Concerning the next batch: It is ok to do your next batch with the same jar, but it is more typical to begin a new batch with a clean jar.

Concerning 'Secondary Ferments': To avoid harming the scoby or having a ferment fail, flavoring is done in a 'secondary ferment'. This is after the scoby has been taken out and you are bottling. You can add whatever flavors you want at this point, without any worries as to harming your scoby. Remember that adding fruit juice or sugar only temporarily increases the sugar content and after leaving it for a day or two a portion of the juice or sugar will be converted (even without the scoby, kombucha is full of probiotics able to metabolize sugars. Be sure to keep the lid on a bit loose to avoid explosion. If you want good carbonation, invest in a swing top bottle (withstands pressure, so you're less likely to be dealing with an explosion!). You can also just stick it in the fridge, the flavor will slowly infuse the liquid, even when cold, and you will get a tiny bit of carbonation over time. There are limitless combinations you can try with this! Included at the end of this guide are just some of the delicious combinations you can try!

FAQ'S

Frequently Asked Questions:

How much should I drink when starting out?

Because of how strong it is, we recommend you start out drinking a small amount and see how your body takes to it. Start with 1 or 2 ounces (a spoonful or two) and increase slowly. Although this sounds overly cautious, it is actually a great way to acclimate your body to something new to get the most benefit out of it in the long run. Keep in mind that Kombucha is a powerful detoxifier and is considered a diuretic too, like coffee (makes you urinate more often), so make sure to drink lots of water if you drink larger quantities of kombucha.

What is growing on top? Is it Mold?

It almost all cases its simply your new baby Kombucha Mushroom. The baby mushroom starts out like a transparent film/skin and then slowly gets bigger. Mold is actually quite rare with Kombucha because the symbiosis of bacteria and yeast keeps the mold at bay. If there ever is mold, it will be growing on top of the baby mushroom and it will look fuzzy, colorful, and usually in spots (not the whole thing) and you would know right away that something was wrong.

Can I make a bigger or smaller batch than 1 quart?

Absolutely! Just simply try to keep the ratios of water, sugar and tea about the same to the instructions above. It's not an exact science, so if you are off a bit, it shouldn't matter. A small mushroom has the ability to brew a large jar, but it may just take extra time. Likewise a large mushroom in a small quantity of sweet tea may ferment quicker.

What happens if I can't separate the mother and baby mushroom?

Most of the time they will separate fairly smoothly with clean hands or some gentle tongs, but occasionally they will be stuck permanently together. That's perfectly fine and normal. You can use them together in the next batch, or if they are torn or have holes in them, they will still make delicious Kombucha tea. It's ok to take some scissors and fashion yourself a little scoby out of what you have to work with.

How many times can I re-use the same Kombucha mushroom?

You can re-use the mushroom as many times as you like. They tend to get a little darker with each batch but will still work great. If they start looking a little too dark and old, you can easily change it out with one the new baby ones you'll most likely have on hand by that point.

How do I store the extra mushrooms?

There are 2 basic ways you can store mushrooms:

1. You can store the mushrooms in a closed jar in a little bit of finished tea (starter tea) in the fridge. If you plan to store them for a very long time, we suggest adding a little sweet tea (the original tea and sugar water) so they have something more to feed on. Keep in mind though, that the fridge can make it more yeasty in the future, and it temporarily slow the kombucha down, so expect your 1st batch out of the fridge to be on the slow side, but should be up to speed for the 2nd batch.
 2. The more common method is to store the extra mushrooms in a large jar at room temperature with a combination of finished tea and sweet tea. And as the liquid evaporates, you need to top it off with sweet tea (every week or two) for the mushroom(s) to eat. This method is sometimes called a 'scoby hotel' and you can store several mushrooms in one jar this way. It will continue to make a new mushroom all the time, which can submerged into the lot or discarded. Discarded mushrooms are great for compost. Dogs love dried mushrooms as chew toys too!
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Recipes

To flavor while fermenting (not usually recommended):

With the mother in the the liquid, add in a couple slices of fresh ginger, or a couple whole vanilla beans. Since kombucha is living, additional ingredients can affect it in unpredictable ways, so we recommend that you only try this

For some store-bought flavoring ideas and other personally recommended products, view our [Kombucha Recommendations](#) page.

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