

Fermenting Vegetables for Healthy Bodies

By Deborah Winter

Do you enjoy pickles, sauerkraut, kimchee, and other pickled vegetables? There are many reasons to make your own, a fun and easy process that turns vegetables into probiotic-laden, health-promoting, delicious condiments. And

benefits.

Fortunately fermenting vegetables in your kitchen is easy. Just a few tips Donna passed on to us:

1. About 1 pound of vegetables will make approximately 1 pint of fermented food. Use any fresh vegetables you have



—photo by Rebecca Shipley

Donna Maltz shows how to prepare vegetables for fermentation.

making your own is much cheaper and more delicious than anything you can buy in the grocery store.

To learn how to do it, about 40 people attended a free hands-on workshop given by Donna Maltz, chef and wellness coach, September 14 at the Kohala Intergenerational Center. Donna described the benefits of eating these fermented probiotic rich vegetables and then supervised as teams of students chopped and grated vegetables and created their own flavor combinations with freshly harvested Hawaiian sea salt, a variety of fresh herbs and exotic spices. Donna explained the details of making a safe and delicious fermented product and how to care for their new health-promoting living organisms. Everyone got to leave with at least a jar or two.

Donna also detailed the many health benefits of eating fermented vegetables, which add natural probiotics loaded with healthy bacteria and enzymes to the digestive system: strengthens immune systems; aids digestion of carbohydrates and protein; helps assimilate nutrients in food; restores healthy intestinal flora; cures constipation; cleans the colon of undigested waste; helps fight cancer; and promotes a healthy pH balance in the body.

The art of fermentation is an ancient one, developed alongside agriculture, in order to preserve vegetables. Unfortunately, industrial processing kills the live probiotic organisms of fermented vegetables, so that even the most expensive pickles and sauerkraut from the grocery store are void of all these health

(a good way to use up those from our Saturday market that you've been wondering what to do with). Chop or grate them any way you like. Add any herbs or spices you enjoy. Cumin, fennel and caraway seeds are good for your digestion, and garlic, ginger, and turmeric are especially medicinal, all adding terrific flavor combinations. This is the time to be creative and make different combinations. Like a fine wine you can pair your ferments with your meal.

2. After chopping or shredding the vegetables, mix them with non-iodized quality sea salt. Sprinkle about 3 tablespoons salt per 5 pounds of vegetables (or 1-1/2 teaspoons for 1 pound of vegetables.) If you have high blood pres-



Karla Heath and Duke Morgan enjoy their products.

sure and are on a restricted salt diet, you can substitute whey, Kefir grains, celery juice or seaweed, a commercial culture starter and/or add lemon or lime juice. Salt-free ferments are actually more bio diverse but can result in mushy vegetables.

3. Use your hands to squeeze and massage the vegetables, herbs and spices and incorporate the salt (or sub-

stitutes) together until liquid forms at the bottom of the bowl; this liquid is your brine. Varying moisture contents of different vegetables will determine how long to squeeze. Cabbage has more moisture than carrots. If you need additional brine you can add some lemon, lime or celery juice at this time.

4. Pack the vegetables tightly in glass jars or a ceramic crock (no metal containers, as metal interferes with the fermentation process). Punch the vegetables down several times and leave plenty of liquid at the top, with at least one to two inches of head room depending on how wide the mouth of your container is (fermentation requires room to expand). Then cover the mixture with a cabbage leaf and plenty of brine. Put a non-metal lid on loosely or a clean woven cloth over the top and secure it with a rubber band.

5. For a milder flavor, leave the jar on your kitchen counter for at least two or three days. For a more potent probiotic ferment, leave out for up to a week. The warmer your kitchen, the faster the process.

6. You may notice some white mold forming but do not be alarmed as this will not harm you or the product. The only kind that isn't good is the rare red, black or brown kind, in which case, feed it to your compost or worm bin, and start over. To avoid mold be sure the product is submerged in the brine so it is not exposed to the air. If you still need more brine you can simply mix a pinch of salt and filtered water and add to the surface.

After three days, you can store the jars with lids in the fridge. Refrigeration will slow down the fermentation process. Fermented vegetables can last almost—forever! But they won't last that long because the fermented food is



A fermenting team at work, from left, Suzanne Sasaki, Duke Morgan, Karla Heath, Nicole Gomes, and Karen Rosen.

so delicious and nutritious.

Of course there are more details and possibilities, but with these basics, you can get started. To learn more, see wild-fermentation.com, bodyecology.com, fermentationrecipes.com, culturedvegetableslife.com, or culturesforhealth.com. Donna is in the process of finalizing a book with a chapter detailing cultured and fermented vegetables.

The fermentation workshop was sponsored by Sustainable Kohala as part of the free Sustainable Saturday Series. The next free workshop will be "Medicinal Herbs at your Feet" by Kai Kaholokai, Saturday, October 12 at the Kohala Intergenerational Center, 3-5 p.m.

Sustainable Kohala's annual fundraiser, the Green Auction, is coming up at the Kohala Country Fair, October 5. If you would like to donate, please call Deborah Winter, 889-6901.

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