

The Simple Guide to Kickass Kombucha

More info: liveeatlearn.com/the-simple-guide-to-kickass-kombucha

The general order of things goes something like this:

1. Make SCOBY (1 to 4 weeks) – to make the “mother”
2. First fermentation (6 to 10 days) – to make the actual kombucha
3. Second fermentation (3 to 10 days) – to carbonate the kombucha

Before we start, here are some general notes that are consistent throughout the whole process.

- No metal or plastic containers. Metal can react with the acidic kombucha and hurt your SCOBY, while plastic can house nasty bacteria that you don't want sneaking in.
- Clean is key. A recurring theme in kombucha brewing is that EVERYTHING must be CLEAN! We're creating the perfect environment for good bacterial growth, but if a bad bacteria slips in, it could ruin your batch (and make you pretty sick).
- Temperature plays a role. Fermentation goes a bit quicker in warmer temperatures, and a bit slower in colder.
- No mold zone. If you see any mold growing on your SCOBY or in the tea (which I understand can be difficult to discern from the hideous SCOBY, but will generally be green, white, or black), then toss your whole batch.

1. HOW TO MAKE A KOMBUCHA SCOBY

The SCOBY (symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast) is the mother of the kombucha, providing bacteria and yeast to ferment the sweet tea, protecting the tea from outside contaminants, and providing a loose seal to keep a bit of the carbonation in. Yes, it's scary and alien looking...but it's the very essence of kombucha! It brings the love and flavor and magic!

To make your SCOBY, you will need:

- 7 cups (1.6 L) clean water
- ½ cup (100 g) white sugar
- 4 bags black tea (or 1 Tbsp loose tea)
- 1 cup (235 mL) unpasteurized, unflavored store-bought kombucha
- A large glass or ceramic jar (I used two ½ gallon (1.8 L) glass jars to make two SCOBYs using this recipe, but anything holding at least ½ gallon will do)

- Tightly woven cloth (coffee filters, paper towels, napkins)
- Rubberbands

Instructions:

1. Bring water to a boil in a clean pot. Remove from heat and dissolve sugar into it.
2. Add the tea and allow to steep while water cools to room temperature (a few hours). Only when water is at room temperature (test by drawing out some water with a straw), is it ready to work with!
3. Pour the sweetened tea into your jar(s), then pour store-bought kombucha in (if you're using two jars, pour $\frac{1}{2}$ of the storebought kombucha into each), making sure to include any little gunkies that may be at the bottom. These are good!
4. Cover with a few layers of the tightly woven cloth (keeps out bugs and debris) and secure with a rubber band.
5. Set somewhere dark, still, and room temperature (70-75 degrees F, 21-24 C), like a cupboard, for 1 to 4 weeks, until a $\frac{1}{4}$ inch ($\frac{1}{2}$ cm) SCOBY has formed.
6. Keep SCOBY in its original tea until you're ready to brew your first batch. The SCOBY should live and grow for years if treated with love. The tea you used to make the SCOBY, however, is very vinegary and should be tossed.

Things to note when making your SCOBY:

- No decaf. The SCOBY doesn't like decaf tea and will not grow as well if fed it (SCOBY = my spirit animal)
- Only black tea. Similarly, the SCOBY doesn't grow as well with green or fruity teas. By all means, once your SCOBY is big and strong you can use green tea, but for now stick with black.
- No honey. So I saw this somewhere and I'm pretty sure this is because honey can contain botulism bacteria that, when grown exponentially as bacteria and yeast tend to do in kombucha, can be dangerous. You can use honey in the second fermentation, once there is a higher number of good bacteria to fight off the bad, but for now, stick to sugar.
- Don't mess with it! You won't see anything but a few bubbles in the first few days. But then one day a thin, translucent layer will form, eventually thickening into a full on SCOBY. If it floats sideways or sinks, leave it! It's just doing it's thing SCOBY thang.
- It's all in the proportions. As I mentioned, I made two SCOBYs with this recipe, and you could probably make more. As long as you keep the proportions in check (7 c water : 1 c starter : 4 bags tea : $\frac{1}{2}$ c sugar), you'll be fine. Also note that this is the same proportion we'll use in the first fermentation, but on a larger scale to make more 'buch!

2. THE FIRST FERMENTATION

So you've got a newbie SCOBY and you're ready to get this kombu-choo train rollin'. This first fermentation is where you actually make the kombucha.

You'll need:

- 14 cups (3.5 quarts, 3.3 L) clean water
- 1 cup (200 g) white sugar
- 8 bags black or green tea (or 2 Tbsp loose leaf)
- 2 cups (470 mL) unflavored starter tea (either from a previous batch or storebought)
- 1 or 2 SCOBYs (depending on how many containers you're using, 1 per container)
- A large glass or ceramic jar (two jars holding at least ½ gallon (1.9 L) each, or one jug holding at least 1 gallon (3.7 L))
- Tightly woven cloth (coffee filters, paper towels, napkins)
- Rubberbands

Instructions:

1. Bring water to a boil in a clean pot. Remove from heat and dissolve sugar into it.
2. Add the tea and allow to steep while water cools to room temperature (a few hours). Only when water is at room temperature. Again, **MUST** be room temperature. Don't risk killing your SCOBY in hot water.
3. With hands **AS CLEAN AS A SURGEON'S** (really clean), gently remove your SCOBY from the tea and place on an equally as clean plate. You can rinse out the jar if you want (without soap), but it's not necessary.
4. Pour the sweetened tea into your jar(s), then pour in starter kombucha (if you're using two jars, pour ½ of the starter kombucha into each).
5. Gently place SCOBY into jar then cover with a few layers of the tightly woven cloth and secure with a rubber band.
6. Set the jar(s) somewhere dark, still, and room temperature (70-75 degrees F, 21-24 C) for anywhere from 6 to 10 days. Begin tasting the tea at about 6 days by gently drawing out some of the tea with a straw. It should be mildly sweet and slightly vinegary. The warmer the air temperature, the faster the kombucha will ferment. The longer the tea ferments, the more sugar molecules will be eaten up, the less sweet it will be.

7. Reserve 2 cups from this batch to use as starter kombucha for your next batch (just leave it in the jar with SCOBY(s) and make your new batch within a few days. The rest can move into the second and final fermentation.

Things to note about the first fermentation:

- Note that in this step, unlike in the making of the SCOBY, you can use other teas besides black. Feel free to experiment with green, white, oolong, or combinations of them. Fruit teas should be mixed with a few black tea bags to ensure the SCOBY mama gets what she needs to thrive.
- Once the SCOBY gets to be about an inch (2.5 cm) thick, peel off a few layers to create a second SCOBY (you can share the love and gift this to a friend!)

3. THE SECOND FERMENTATION

The final step and negotiably the best part of the process! The second fermentation is where the real magic happens. It's where you can play around with sweet, fruity flavors that will not only make your kombucha taste better than store-bought, but will give those good bacteria the power to kick it into high carbonation gear, bringing everything together into effervescent bliss. Let's finish this.

You'll need:

- Kombucha from the first fermentation
- Sweetener (fruit, honey, or sugar). Here are a few ideas per 1 cup kombucha:
 - 1 to 2 Tbsp mashed fruit or fruit juice
 - A slice of orange
 - 1 to 2 tsp honey
 - a piece of peppermint candy
 - a piece of candied ginger
 - *to add chia seeds, see below under "things to note"
- A few fermenting bottles (Bottles meant for fermentation have an airtight seal, which will prevent carbonation from escaping. If you don't have these, canning jars will do an alright job, though they aren't truly airtight)

Instructions:

1. Strain kombucha and funnel into bottles, leaving about 1 1/2 inches as the top (3.8 cm).
2. Add your chosen sweetener and seal tightly with lid.
3. Let ferment somewhere dark and room temperature for 3 to 10 days.

4. If desired, strain out fruit before serving. Place in fridge to slow the carbonation process.

Things to note about the second fermentation:

- Your jars can explode if the pressure becomes too high! For your first few batches while you're still getting the hang of how kombucha reacts to your environment, bottle a portion of it in a plastic bottle. This will act as a gauge for how the others are doing. When the plastic bottle is rock solid, the rest are probably done. "Burp" them by opening each to release some pressure, then place them in the refrigerator to slow fermentation.
- Carefully open bottles over the sink with a towel in hand.
- The more sugar/fruit you add, the faster the kombucha will ferment and become carbonated.
- Chia seeds are my favorite addition to kombucha. Rather than adding these to the 'buch when we add the sweetener, we'll stir these in at the very end after the kombucha has been carbonated. Use 1 Tbsp of chia seeds per 1 cup of kombucha. Stir in the seeds and allow them to do their absorbing thang for a few hours, stirring every once in awhile to keep them from clumping.

Happy brewing!!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sarah".