

Let's Preserve Sauerkraut

Recommended varieties	King Cole and Danish hybrids. Early varieties are lower in sugar and less desirable for making kraut.
Quantity	A 50-pound bag of fresh cabbage makes 16 to 20 quarts of kraut.
Quality	To make good kraut, use disease-free, firm, sweet, mature heads of cabbage from mid- and late-season crops. Prepare and start the fermentation one to two days after harvesting the cabbage.
Containers, weights, and covers for fermenting cabbage	A one-gallon stone crock holds 5 pounds of shredded cabbage, and a 5-gallon crock holds 25 pounds. Glass and food-grade plastic containers are also suitable. Many restaurants receive foods and ingredients in 5-gallon plastic pails, which make ideal fermentation containers. Do not use garbage bags or trash liners. A large, sealed, food-grade plastic bag containing 4-1/2 tablespoons of salt and 3 quarts of water may be used as a weight to hold shredded cabbage under the surface of brine during fermentation. You may also use a plate and jars of water for this purpose. Select a pie or dinner plate just small enough to fit inside the fermentation container. Place two or three clean quart jars filled with water on the plate to keep it under the brine surface. Covering the weight and container top with a heavy clean bath towel reduces mold growth on the brine surface.
Preparation	Work with about 6 pounds of fresh cabbage at a time. Discard outer leaves. Rinse heads with cold water and drain. Cut heads in quarters and remove cores; trim and discard worm- and disease-damaged tissue. Shred or slice cabbage to a thickness of 1 to 2 quarters (1/16 to 1/8 inch).
Filling and packing containers	Place 5 pounds of shredded cabbage in the fermentation container and add and mix thoroughly 3 tablespoons of canning or pickling salt. With clean hands, pack it until the level of natural juices drawn from the cabbage covers its surface. Continue preparing and packing 5-pound quantities of shredded cabbage and 3 tablespoons of salt at a time until finished or until the fermentation container is filled within 3 to 4 inches from its top. At this time, add either a plate and filled jars or a plastic bag containing 3 quarts of water to keep the cabbage under the brine solution. Cover the cabbage-filled container with a clean, heavy bath towel.

Fermentation temperature, time, and management

Store the container at 70°F to 75°F during fermentation. At these temperatures, kraut will be fully fermented in about 3 to 4 weeks; at 60°F to 65°F, fermentation may take 6 weeks. Below 60°F, kraut may not ferment. Above 80°F, kraut may become soft and spoil. If you weight the cabbage with a brine-filled bag, do not disturb the crock until the normal fermentation is completed (when bubbling ceases). If you use jars as weight, you must check the kraut two to three times each week and remove scum if it forms. Fully fermented kraut may be kept tightly covered in the refrigerator for several months or it may be canned or frozen.

Freezing procedure

Don't freeze more than 2 pounds of food per cubic foot of freezer capacity per day. Bring kraut and liquid slowly to a boil in a large kettle, stirring frequently. Remove from heat. Cool. Fill pint- or quart-size freezer bags to a level of 3 to 4 inches from their tops, squeeze out air, seal, and label. Before freezing, bags may be inserted into reusable rigid plastic freezer containers for added protection against punctures and leakage.

Canning procedure

Wash jars. Prepare lids according to manufacturer's instructions. To make a hot pack, bring kraut and liquid slowly to a boil in a large kettle, stirring frequently. Remove from heat and fill jars rather firmly with kraut and juices, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. To make a raw pack, fill jars firmly with unheated kraut and cover with juices, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Wipe sealing edge of jars with a clean, damp paper towel. Add lids, tighten screw bands, and process in a boiling water canner.

Process times

Recommended process times in a boiling water canner at designated altitudes

Style of pack	Jar size	Process time at altitude of	
		0–1000 ft (min)	1001–3000 ft (min)
Hot	Pint	10	15
Hot	Quart	15	20
Raw	Pint	20	25
Raw	Quart	25	30

After processing is completed, remove jars from canner with a jar lifter and place on a towel or rack. Do not retighten screw bands. Air-cool jars 12 to 24 hours. Remove screw bands and check lid seals. If the center of the lid is indented, wash, dry, label, and store jar in a clean, cool, dark place. If lid is unsealed, examine and replace jar if defective; use new lids and reprocess as before. Wash screw bands and store separately. Kraut is best if consumed within a year and safe as long as lids remain vacuum sealed.

Nutritional information

Average content of a 1/2 cup serving (4 to 4.4 oz) of canned sauerkraut

	Solids and liquids
Calories	22
Carbohydrates (g)	5
Fats (g)	0.2
Protein (g)	1
Sodium (mg)	780
Vitamin C*	30
Iron*	10

*U.S. Recommended Daily Allowances (US RDA). Kraut is an insignificant source of other vitamins.

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