Brewing your own ‘Kombucha’ Tea

Congratulations on deciding to improve your knowledge and health by making and drinking ‘Kombucha’ Tea.

If this is the first time you have set out to make Kombucha, then read on for instructions, but if you’ve done it before and just needed a new ‘Scoby’ to get started again, see my notes at the end of the booklet.

There is so much info on Kombucha on the internet that following are a few websites that give all the info you’ll ever need on brewing and drinking Kombucha. Simply read thru them, print them off or take notes and you’re away. Experiment with different flavours, give some to your friends and family to try and know that “It’s got to be good for you’.

‘Scoby’ stands for ‘Symbiotic Culture Of Bacteria and Yeasts’ and is a cellulose matrix or ‘bio-film’ that feels like tough jelly or rubber. They are surprisingly tough and can even be frozen for later use. However, being a living community of bacteria and yeast, they are temperature sensitive and can die if placed into a batch of tea that is still hot.

Read through the following websites for a start:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kombucha - Intro and history of kombucha
http://kombu.de/english.htm - The Kombucha Journal from the worlds leading authority on Kombucha.
http://kombu.de/anleit-e.htm - Detailed instructions on making Kombuch.

Health benefits of Kombucha:
http://www.kombuchacultures.com/kombucha_health_benefits.html &
http://www.nutrasanus.com/kombucha.html
http://www.kombucha-america.com

www.youtube.com – Simply type ‘kombucha’ into the search box and you’ll find plenty of videos on how to brew kombucha etc.

How I personally make my Kombucha:

Following is the basic way that I make my Kombucha. I have been making and drinking it continuously for over 6 years now and haven’t had a real cold or the flu since so it must be doing something good.
I make it using the old glass 800ml “Agee” preserving jars and simply use 2-3 tea bags and 50-60 grams of sugar per jar (1/4 cup per jar or 1/3 cup max per litre). I add a scoby and starter tea, keep them in my pantry (out of the sun) and find it takes 5-7 days to brew (longer in winter because the room is colder). To taste test it for readiness, I use a straw carefully pushed down the inside of the jar or simply tip it gently to sip some from the edge after 4-5 days. If it still tastes really sweet, then I leave it another day and test again. If it is left to ferment too long it will start to taste like vinegar, and while still safe, Ok and technically even better for your health, I usually don’t bother. Once it tastes like vinegar it cannot be saved by adding more sugar or anything so I simply take my losses and chuck it out, it’s only a few cents lost.

Basically, once it’s accumulating air pockets under the scoby, has a fizzy taste and isn’t too sweet, it’s ready for drinking or bottling. I then bottle it into old glass drink bottles such as old “V” and Red Bull bottles that I have collected from other people who drink them. I find glass drink bottles give a better flavour than plastic bottles if left for a few days before drinking. I aim to drink a bottle/glass a day, so make 7 to 10 bottles a week.

I experiment with different flavours and am currently using 1 or 2 teabags of black tea and vanilla flavour and one bag of raspberry and peach flavour per Agee jar. It gives a nice fruity edge to the taste. The traditional 2 black or 2 green tea bags will give a hint of apple-like taste.

Many people like to do a first ferment with just black or green tea then when they pour it off into bottles, they do a second ferment by adding some fresh or dried fruit or other flavourings such as ginger or lemon/lime to the bottle. Screw the cap on tight and then allow another 3-5 days for the added fruit/flavouring to ferment and infuse the brew with it’s flavor. This can give some very fizzy results that may end up on your ceiling if you’re not careful.

Experiment yourself using different flavoured teas or herbal/fruit infusion teas, but always use at least one or two black or green tea bags per litre as many of the herbal/fruit teas contain very little actual ‘tea’ leaves and the tea is necessary for the scoby to feed on.

As for the ‘Scoby’ (Symbiotic Culture Of Bacteria and Yeast) I have found that a scoby that is two or three layers (generations) thick gives the best flavoured drink so don’t be surprised or disappointed if your first batch is nothing to rave about. Simply put both the original/mother scoby and the newly grown scoby/baby into a new batch of tea for the second week and you should get a better brew next time round. 2 or 3 scobies in a brew seem to give a better result than just a single scoby. Stuck together layers of scoby float better than single ones too because of the air trapped between the layers so I like to keep my scobies at 2-4 layers thick.

If your scoby sinks in a new batch of tea, it just means the new one that forms on the surface won’t be stuck to it (obviously). If your scobies always float and get thicker each week, peel off the older bottom layer or two so that it doesn’t take up too much volume in the jar.
What to do with the old scobies? Give them to friends to start their own kombucha, start another jar/batch yourself or simply throw them out. I put my extras in my worm farm/compost.

If you still need more help, info or tips, check out the Internet or you are welcome to email me at dave@insites.co.nz.

To your enjoyment and good health.

David

**To start your first Kombuch culture:**

First have a browse of the websites mentioned in page 2 and/or Youtube.com to get an idea on what it’s all about then….

Get a glass Agee jar or similar with a volume of around 1 litre and ¾ fill with boiling water and add two black tea bags. (2-3 tea bags per 800-1000ml) Leave to draw/brew for at least 15 mins then add 50-60g of plain, white sugar (1/4 of a cup) and stir to dissolve (70-80g or 1/3 cup max for 1 litre). You can use raw or cane sugar if you want, tho it makes little difference.

(Don’t be tempted to use a little extra sugar as if you use too much sugar the Ph of the brew will be too high which mould loves so you run the risk of enabling mould to grow before the Kombucha scoby does and thus ruin your brew).

Remove the tea bags and leave to cool to room temperature (it will take a few hours to cool).

*(Note: Always use a glass jar or container to brew your Kombucha as it becomes more acidic as it brews and can react with plastic containers).*

Once the brew of sweetened tea has cooled to room temperature, add about 3-4 Tablespoons (or all of it if you want as the more the merrier) of the supplied kombucha tea or starter (also at room temp) into the Tea then carefully add your supplied kombucha scoby/culture into the jar as well. It may float, but will probably sink and it doesn’t really matter which it does.

The reason for the starter tea is to lower the Ph of the sweetened tea as all the bacteria and yeasts of a Kombucha brew prefer a more acidic solution to reproduce faster while mould likes a more acidic solution. Thus, starter tea speeds up the brewing process and reduces the risk of mould contamination.

If you get obvious mould growing on the top of your brew, it’s either because you used too much sugar or not enough starter tea, or both.

Place the jar in your pantry or somewhere out of direct sunlight and cover the top with muslin or some other breathable fabric to stop ants and fruit flies getting into it but still allowing air to flow in and out of the jar. Air is needed by the yeast and bacteria in the scoby to breath.

Leave it for 4-5 days to ferment/brew. During this time a new scoby or ‘baby’ will start forming on the surface of the tea and if your original one was floating, the new ‘baby’ will most likely be adhered to it (the ‘Mother’). After 4-5 days (4-5 in summer or 6-7 in winter if it’s cooler where you keep your brew) you may see it starting to get bubbles collecting under the new floating scoby.

To taste test it, try and carefully draw a little bit out with an eye dropper or straw to taste it. You may even just gently tip the jar enough to sip some directly from the jar.
Always try not to disturb the new scoby too much as when you wet the (dry) surface you form a barrier to oxygen transfer and may slow or stall the fermenting process if it’s not ready to pour off. If it’s still really sweet and not very effervescent, leave it another day or 2 then test again. If it’s really fizzy and only slightly sweet, it’s ready. It may have a real ‘sweet n sour’ tang to it which is what a lot of people aim for. If it tastes too vinegary, it’s been left too long. However, the more sour or vinegary it tastes, the less sugar there is in it and the more beneficial digestive acids, enzymes and bacteria it contains so those on real health kick wanting the best possible health benefits from their Kombucha will deliberately brew it longer to be on the sour side rather than the sweet side.

When the taste is just how you want it, pour off 80-90% of it to either drink straight away or you can bottle it to drink over the next few days etc. Take the remaining 10-20% and the now 2 scobies and start a new batch with another brew of sweetened tea as per the start of these instructions. Using 2 scobies in the second batch should give you an even better result than the first. It may take two or three brews to get it really working well. Be patient. After the second or third brew, you can peel off the older scobies and use them to start a new/second brew in a new jar. You may soon learn that you may need/want 3 or 4 jars brewing at once or use a larger glass jar if you can find one to make enough for everyone in the household to have a glass each day.

Remember, it’s all about experimenting, finding what works best for you in your situation and what kind of flavour you like.

Have Fun and enjoy. 😊

**Warning Though!**
Brewing fermented drinks can be so intriguing and fun it can become addictive and you may soon you find your kitchen looking like this:

**Disclaimer:**
All the information contained in this brochure is from my own personal experience and use of Kombucha. Results may differ based on the use of your own materials and ingredients.