

My favourite authors on fermenting are Sandor Katz and Sally Fallon, however, Alys Fowler has some very accessible books that can often be picked up cheaply (The Works, TK Maxx).

We both like spicy food, so often make Korean style ferments (e.g. our version of Kimchi), although the traditional Sauerkraut is super easy and delicious (we've made less of this as we've not grown any cabbages yet, so have to buy them in).

Sandor Katz really encourages experimentation with vegetables rather than just sticking to just cabbage, hence the carrot, radish, & garlic kraut we made. The only other ingredient of this is the salt (we use good quality Hebridean sea salt) – the strong flavour comes from the fermentation itself. It is super easy! We grated similar quantities of carrot and radish, added a few cloves of garlic, and then pounded it hard with salt (to taste, but see below) until the juices were running (I used a wooden potato masher of the type that's quite common in Northern Europe – the end of a rolling pin would also work well). It was then packed into clean jars so that all the veg was below the level of the liquid (if there is not enough juice add a little water). If you find the veg floats Alys Fowler suggests using some cleaned and sterilised stones from the garden to weigh everything down. Or you could use a strong, clean, sandwich bag with water in it to weigh everything down. As it ferments it will produce gas which needs to escape, so don't seal the lid too tightly (or loosen it every now and then to let the gas out). Some liquid might bubble out too, so maybe stand the jar on a saucer or plate. Once you like the taste (a personal very thing – the kraut starts mild and gets stronger with time) stick it in the fridge to slow the fermenting (the warmer the weather the faster it ferments).

The salt is important to help with the preservation.. Alys Fowler gives the following as a rule of thumb:

- Cabbage or turnip (for kraut) 1-2% salt
- Cabbage, radish, turnip, chillies (for kimchi) 3-4% salt
- Cucumber (for pickle) 5-8% salt
- Lemons or limes (for preserved lemons) 5-10% salt

We often make a kimchi with greens from the garden. The batch I gave you has a mixture of everything that was starting to bolt in the garden, just use a combination of what you've got -

533g beetroot tops
124g chard
558g chicory
137g American landcress
138g chickweed
24g orache
10 tsp salt

The large leaves were shredded, but I left some of the smaller ones whole as I like the different textures (although, maybe next time I'd chop the chickweed a bit more as it is a bit on the stringy side). This was mixed together in a couple of large bowls and left overnight with a weight on them to press out the juices. I checked on it a few times during the evening and gave a stir to get the salt nicely distributed. The next morning it will have collapsed down a bit and you need to rinse off the salt – don't worry about draining too much water when you rinse as this will help produce the liquid to cover the kimchi. The next step is to mix in the other ingredients – I used:

14 garlic cloves (crushed)
62g ginger (grated)
14 tsp toasted sesame seeds
78g spring onion
7 tsp Nigerian hot pepper (this should be Korean pepper, but I can't buy it around here – the African shop in Inverness sells this nice hot pepper which I used instead)
5 tsp sweet paprika (again, this is a substitute for the Korean pepper which is hot, but also slightly sweet)
2 tsp flour (Alys suggests using rice flour, but I didn't have any – it just gives a little more body to the texture)

This needs to be mixed together really well and then packed into clean jars again with liquid covering the surface, as for the kraut. I managed to fill a total of 3l of jars. (N.B. A lot of kimchi recipes have fish sauce in them which I've omitted to keep it veggie).

If you are making a root veg kimchi (radish are excellent for this, but use a mix of your favourites) you can make a brine solution to soak the veg in as they don't have the pounding you would give a kraut to distribute the salt. Soak chunky pieces in the brine for ca. 3-4 hours (or overnight) – test that it's ready by rinsing off the brine and tasting – if it's salty it's ready for the next phase. Similar to the leafy kimchi above, rinse the soaked veg, cut into smaller pieces, and mix with the other spices (making it more or less spicy to your taste).

It's fun to experiment. I made a kimchi with nettles in late spring, but forgot to rinse off the salt. It was horribly salty to eat alone, but was excellent when used as a stock in Asian cooking. I'll definitely try to repeat it again, even though it was technically a failure! Just make sure that you use clean jars, and if you do find any mould on the surface it's usually fine to just scoop it off and use the untainted stuff below (although I've not had this problem in Scotland as the pantry stays mostly cool). If you use the right amount of salt and keep the veg below the liquid surface you shouldn't have any problems.

One of our favourite dishes is bubble and squeak made with the kimchi rather than cabbage / greens. It's excellent with a fried egg and Asian style carrot salad. Kimchi also makes an excellent noodle soup base or addition to egg fried rice if you find it too strong to eat by itself. Traditional cabbage Sauerkraut is a perfect match to a grilled cheese sandwich with mustard (a real guilty pleasure that one!).

Good luck having a go for yourself. If you want a more prescriptive recipe the internet has loads of different things to try.