



KOMBUCHA CRAZE

Brewing for good health

The famed fermented tea has truly gone mainstream.

Words Lindy Davis

Miracle fungus, gout jellyfish and Manchurian mushroom tea – these are all names that describe the popular fermented tea commonly known as kombucha. Global demand for this ‘elixir of immortality’ has bubbled well beyond the health food shops, into the mainstream market.

Originating in the Far East, the naturally fermented health drink was used as a medicinal tonic for centuries. Recognised for its health benefits in aiding digestion and balancing the gut, committed kombucha fans say it also gives them additional immune support, better metabolism, increased energy and a sense of overall wellbeing.

SCOBY 101

What is it?

The SCOBY resembles a circle of pale colourless rubber and can be re-used for further batches of kombucha.

Making your own SCOBY

Take a third of the contents from a bottle of organic kombucha and transfer it to a clean glass jar with a breathable cotton cover fixed with a rubber band.

Good for the gut

A healthy digestive system is the foundation to optimal health. A Harvard Medical School study described the gut as having 100 trillion micro-organisms from 500 different identified species, indicating we are much more bacterial than human. We know now that the over-use of antibiotics and exposure to antibacterial products can impact and change the structure of the gut, so demand for fermented foods and drinks that contain billions of beneficial bacteria has correspondingly increased.

Kombucha produces lactic and acetic acid, encouraging beneficial bifida bacteria in the intestines. This creates stable microflora and a probiotic effect that ultimately produces a better-balanced body pH.

Healing from the inside out takes time and patience, and the art of kombucha-brewing requires both. From just water, tea and sugar, the fermentation process produces a complex concentration of essential B vitamins, organic acids, enzymes and probiotics.

There are numerous kombucha brands available, some following a more traditional approach using only black or green tea, while others add fruit and spices.

Bring on the booch

Liv McGregor and Rene Schliebs, founders of Mama’s Brew Shop were thrown together through a meeting at a playground.

“My husband got talking to Rene at the playground and somehow it came up that she wanted to make kombucha, but couldn’t find a SCOBY (Symbiotic Colony of Bacteria and Yeast). He told her that I had a thing for fermentation, she picked up a SCOBY from me and things developed from there.”

A year later the two women cemented the friendship with their own business, becoming one big brew-shop family. They soon outgrew Rene’s garage and purchased a disused butcher shop in Helensville, naming it the Kombuchery.

“We didn’t want to be a fruit juice or pop soda business. We believe kombucha goes alongside a cool craft beer or a delicious chilled wine. What grown-up ever felt like an orange juice at night?”

Organic growth

Matakana-based boutique brand Daily Organics is the brainchild of Delwyn Ward and Brad Gwynne. Delwyn had been brewing kombucha for friends and family and selling to the Matakana Farmers’ Market for a decade. Since embracing an organic diet with raw food and fermented tea, Delwyn says she has more energy and her family is thriving.

From small beginnings in 2014, the organic brand quickly outgrew its modest premises. Brad moved to Matakana to help grow the business and hasn’t looked back.

“The demand for our kombucha has grown exponentially. We didn’t want to rush into the market – it’s about setting yourself apart and creating something that’s real. People are smart about what they’re choosing to consume and we’ve created an authentic product that we enjoy and we’re proud of.”

Daily Organics is BioGro-certified, using only organic ingredients.

Three flavours, Original, Winter and Summer, are solely produced with fermented black, white and green tea, with no added flavours.

“We compare our kombucha to a good salad, which might only be home-grown heirloom tomatoes and fresh basil, but it tastes delicious. Too many flavours can complicate things.” >



Craft your own kombucha

Makes about 1 litre

¼ cup organic whole cane sugar
2-4 teaspoons organic black, green or white loose leaf tea (or 2-4 teabags)

1 litre boiled filtered water
1 SCOBY* and starter culture
fruits, herbs or spices of your choice (optional)

Combine sugar, tea and water in a pot. Stir until sugar dissolves.

Strain off tea leaves (or remove tea bags) and leave the sweet tea solution to cool in a large glass jar. Once the liquid is at room temperature, add the SCOBY and starter culture – use a wooden spoon to handle the SCOBY to avoid contamination. Fix a cloth cover over the jar using a rubber band.

Keep the jar in a dry place at room temperature away from direct sunlight and avoid moving it. Check the brew after seven days. If it’s still too sugary then leave to ferment for a few more days. Once you’ve done a taste test and you think it’s ready, refrigerate it and enjoy a flat brew.

Alternatively, you can add fruit, herbs or spices and bottle it to further ferment, creating a fizzy beverage. Fill liquid as close as possible to the top of the bottle to remove any air and increase carbonation. Store bottles in a cardboard box (in case of explosions) to continue carbonation process for a further 4-10 days. A warmer air temperature will increase carbonation. Once this process is complete, refrigerate bottles to keep the kombucha fresh. Enjoy!

SCOBY savvy

- A SCOBY can be gifted, purchased or make your own (see SCOBY 101, far left). Should the SCOBY appear to have any mould, discard it and start again.
- Don’t be afraid if the SCOBY looks larger/wider than others you’ve seen – it will take on the shape of the brewing vessel.
- After the first batch of kombucha has brewed, a ‘mini-me’ SCOBY should form at the top of the vessel. You can use both for the next kombucha brew or give one to a friend.
- Save ½ cup of kombucha from the first brew, which will become the new starter for the next batch.

Wellness tonic

Directors Amber and Alex Campbell from Tauranga-based Good Buzz Kombucha, say 'wellness' is key to their brand.

Alex's grandmother Amy Campbell made 'Manchurian tea' during the 70s in Kaikohe.

Her legacy is fiercely maintained by the family, who believe she brought the culture back to New Zealand from Japan. She brewed for the next 40 years before passing her brewing secrets on to Alex's father and his family.

Amber, the booch-master for Good Buzz, says after a year experimenting with various teas and different temperatures, (with some exploding bottles) the perfect brew was born. They now have seven different flavours (Lemon Ginger, Jasmine, Green Tea, Feijoa, Coffee, Origins and Raspberry Lemon) in their product line.

"Our flavours are aligned with a refreshing cider, not overly sweet. We want people to have the taste of a real brew, particularly when opting out of alcohol or being the sober driver."

She says her children love drinking kombucha and there's also the added benefit of it helping wean people off alcohol. Her husband Alex was involved in data analytics for a Palo Alto software company before throwing himself full time into their kombucha business.

"Alex had some stress during his early days in the military and alcohol made things much worse. He made the decision to give it up altogether, opting to drink kombucha instead. It's good to know you can transform people's lives."

Premium probiotics

Organic Mechanic (OM) was formed by a group of friends who believe that food and lifestyle play an integral role in preventative medicine and overall wellbeing.

Auckland brand manager Graedon Parker says the business was created after his friend's father was diagnosed with multiple myeloma malignancy. They began researching alternative holistic health food options using only organic ingredients.

"Our green smoothie was first off the mark, followed by kombucha, which came as part of our research into probiotics. Our core philosophy is engaging in good health, from the inside out."

Three years on they have transformed an old bus shelter into a smoothie and kombucha OM shack at Auckland's La Cigale French market and established 10 refill stations around Auckland.

Brew it yourself

Such is the demand for the gut-friendly fermented tonic, restaurants and cafés have now taken to creating their own brew.

Home brewer and fermented foods devotee Sarah James says brewing requires time and patience, but is relatively easy once you have the right formula.

"Consistency is important. The longer the brew is left to ferment, the better it will be. If you use more sugar than recommended, then the alcohol content increases."

She says you can create your own brew at the second fermentation stage by adding fruit, aromatics, herbs or spices.

"I've been brewing now for seven years. I started initially to help balance my gut, but I also found it was a great substitute for beer."

The good news is that should you become a real fan of kombucha, you can always make your own brew. **g**



BEST BREWS



Mama's Brew Shop

Choose from Warrior or Love flavours.

mamasbrewshop.com



Daily Organics

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Organic Mechanic

Two delicious flavours to choose from.

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