



Krautsourcing: A short history of Fermentation & Sauerkraut

Humans have been actively fermenting products thousands of years and before that, probably consumed fermented products without actively trying to create fermentation. Many of the first ferments were beverages, both alcoholic and dairy. Evidence of a fermented alcoholic beverages made from fruit, honey, and rice dating back to 7000-6600 BCE have been found in what is now China. Wine-making dates to around 6000 BCE in Georgia, in the Caucasus region of Eurasia.

The milk of camels, goats, sheep, and cattle was naturally fermented as far back as 10,000 BCE. There is evidence pointing to cheese making in Poland some 7,500 years ago, and the Near East 8,000 years ago. It has been suggested that the first yogurts were produced in goat bags draped over the backs of camels in the heat of North Africa, where daily temperatures of 43C would have seen spontaneous fermentation of milk.

Exactly who and when sauerkraut was "invented", is not known. The word *sauerkraut* is a German word meaning sour cabbage, but fermenting cabbage didn't originate in Germany. Apparently, those working on the construction of the Great Wall of China (in 3rd century BCE) ate a fermented cabbage. Chinese *saun cai* was fermented in rice wine, but when it made it over to Europe with Mongol tribes and Tatars, it eventually became popular in many northern European and Baltic states, after being used as a folk remedy through many monasteries. It was used in addition to promoting the digestion, to purify blood and skin, to heal ulcers, inflammation, gout, headaches and hangovers.

Europeans made it their own, leaving out the wine (keeping that for drinking?) and fermenting cabbage in salt instead. It was recognised as a health-promoting food too, with The famous ship captain, James Cook, once ordered 25,000 pounds of sauerkraut to outfit two ships, as it was recognised to prevent scurvy in sailors. The reason was the high level of vitamin C in sauerkraut. Also it was ideal for long sea voyages due to the long storage life.

Traditionally, Eastern European families prepared for winter by putting up several barrels of sauerkraut. Depending on the size of the family and the size of the cabbage, a clan might ferment as many as 300 whole heads of cabbage in wooden barrels.

Sauerkraut and other ferments have seen a renaissance in production and consumption in recent years due to the increasing amount of research and evidence showing the incredible health benefits of fermented food and the importance of the microbiome (all the bacteria on and in a human body) in humans.



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