

How to Make Kefir

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Kefir is a probiotic-rich milk drink similar to thin yogurt. Traditional kefir is made from cow, goat, or sheep milk, cultured by kefir grains composed of polysaccharides, bacteria, and yeast living in symbiosis. It is not possible to harness these in nature like with sourdough yeast; they must be acquired from someone who already has them.

How to Care for and Use Kefir Grains

A LIVING FOOD: Kefir grains must be fed consistently and cultured at 68-77 degrees F. They can lie mostly dormant in a fridge for a week and need a half cup of milk switched out every few days during that time.

EQUIPMENT: Do not use copper, zinc, or aluminum, and avoid any other metal. Glass is best, as it cannot harbor bacteria and will not react. When the kefir is cultured, strain through nylon mesh, doubled cheesecloth, or a coffee filter.

CULTURING: Anything that touches kefir must be absolutely clean to avoid bacteria competition. Place kefir grains in a glass jar and cover with milk. Cover tightly with a porous material like cheesecloth, a thin dish towel, or coffee filter. Place in a dark area 12-24 hours. If kefir separates, stir with a wooden or plastic spoon.

OTHER MILKS: Most alternative milks give inconsistent results. Coconut milk is the most consistent, although it does not thicken as mammalian milk does. If you do use alternative milk, every fourth batch still needs to be done in regular milk to ensure that the cultures are fed properly.

Water Kefir

Water kefir grains feed on sugar water with minerals, culture at

room temperature, and become dormant in the fridge. The result is slightly sweet and less tangy than milk kefir. It can be infused with other flavors to make a soda substitute.

WATER: Use either bottled water or boiled water because chlorine will harm the culture. Boiling beforehand also helps incorporate sugar and minerals. Allow boiled water to cool to room temperature before adding kefir grains.

MINERALS: The grains also like a varied mineral source that can come from your natural water supply, a pinch of sea salt, or pinch of baking soda. Other sources include a half teaspoon of molasses or a small handful of raisins.

SUGARS: Kefir grains prefer white cane sugar, brown sugar, cane juice crystals, sucanat, and raw sugar. Use maple syrup or coconut palm sugar in very low amounts combined with another sugar. Honey bacteria competes with kefir. Stevia and agave do not have proper nutrients to feed kefir grains. The acidity level of fruit juice can hurt kefir grains.

Culture in a glass jar in a dark area for 24-48 hours.

Kefir Culture

Freeze-dried kefir culture powder may be frozen until ready to use and makes approximately one quart. It produces thicker kefir and

can use alternative milks, coconut water, or fruit juice. These batches can be re-cultured several times before the bacterial culture becomes spent. Add ¼ cup of cultured kefir to one quart of new liquid, stir, cover, and allow to sit 12-16 hours.

Flavoring Your Kefir

After removing grains, add fresh or dried fruit, bags of herbal tea, or spices. Cover the kefir and allow to sit another 12 hours as flavors infuse. You can add sweetener to milk kefir to make it more palatable.

Sharing

Over time, kefir grains multiply. To avoid overculturing, share them with friends and family or blend in a probiotic smoothie. If you are new to probiotic foods or kefir, consume ½-1 cup per day as your gut adjusts to the sudden influx of good bacteria.

Recipes

MILK KEFIR RECIPE

2 tsp milk kefir grains
2 cups milk or milk alternative

WATER KEFIR RECIPE

¼ cup water kefir grains
¼ cup sugar
4 cups water
Mineral source if not using well or spring water

