

Sauerkraut – The Story of a Dish



Sauerkraut is finely shredded white cabbage which has been fermented by various lactic acid bacteria. It is mostly served cooked as a side dish and is well known as one of Germany's most important national dishes. The word "Sauerkraut" can be translated directly as "sour herb" or "sour cabbage".

History

Preserving food due to lactic acid fermentation is a very old technique which is used all over the world. For example, sour cabbage was known in ancient Rome as well as in ancient Greece and even in China.

Until the invention of new methods for food preservation "Sauerkraut" was one of the most eaten dishes in winter all over Germany, the Netherlands and Poland.

Moreover, "Sauerkraut" contains a high amount of vitamins, such as vitamin C, and that is why eating it was a good way to prevent deficiency symptoms in winter.

Because of that it was also a common victual on ships after it had been discovered in the 18th century that eating sour cabbage has an antiscorbutic effect.

Recipe

You'll need : 1 large crock, 2 heads of cabbage, kosher salt, freezer bags, a wooden spoon

At first, remove the outer leaves. Then wash the cabbage, cut it into quarters and remove the core. Shred the cabbage into fine stripes and mix it using the wooden

spoon with the Kosher salt (use four tablespoons of Kosher salt with 5 pounds of shredded cabbage – do not use table salt). When juice starts to form on the cabbage from tossing put the cabbage carefully into the clean crock. Press firmly to encourage juice formation. Fill the crock no closer than 5 inches from the top. Please make sure that the juice covers the cabbage completely.

Place a large plastic bag filled with brine water and lay it on top of the cabbage.

The cabbage must be well-sealed all around with the bag, so no air can get in and contaminate the “Sauerkraut” with unwanted yeasts or molds!

Now cover the crock with plastic wrap, then a heavy towel and tie securely into place. Do not remove this until fermenting is complete!

Put the whole thing in an area where the temperature will not be above 24°C. Fermentation will begin within a day, depending upon the room temperature. If the room temperature is 24°C allow three weeks for fermentation. If the temperature is 21°C allow four weeks. If the temperature is 18°C allow five weeks. If the temperature is 15.5°C allow six weeks.

Source: <http://chetday.com/sauerkrautrecipe.htm>

Taste and Smell

“Sauerkraut” has a mild-sour taste and smell.

“Sauerkraut” and German culture

“Sauerkraut” has been a widely spread everyday dish among all social classes for a very long time, especially in the southern part of Germany. Moreover, it was one of Liselotte von der Pfalz’s favourite dishes. Living at Louis XIV.’s court in Versailles she ordered a recipe for “Sauerkraut” from Hannover and translated it for the French cook.

During the Second World War the expression “Sauerkraut” was used as a swearword for Germans by many Britons and Americans. However, the connection between German cuisine and “Sauerkraut” turns out to be much older. From documents from the 17th century for instance we know that German immigrants in America still kept their eating habits and, thus, also produced “Sauerkraut” and typical sausages.

The word ‘sauerkraut’ even became a part of the English language and this extraordinary traditional dish also influenced the American cuisine (e.g. as ‘hotdog with sauerkraut’).

Sources

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