

How to Know When Your Fermented Vegetables Are Ready for Cold Storage



To the new fermenter every step of the fermentation process can be a bit intimidating, from trusting that the fermentation will keep the vegetables from spoiling to braving the first bite.

One of the biggest questions people have is, "How do I know when my fermented vegetables are finished culturing?"

The fermentation process is continual, and flavors will change over time. Cultured vegetables will taste different over time, as microorganisms continue to do their work on the sugars and other carbohydrates found in the vegetables.

There are three obvious signs that the fermentation process has at least commenced enough that fermenting vegetables can be moved to cold storage.

Temperature will play a role in how quickly these signs appear, so results may vary from season to season and batch to batch.

Signs That Fermented Vegetables Are Finished

Bubbling

The lactic acid fermentation process produces lactic acid bacteria that create gases when they feast on the vegetables. These gases are often visible as bubbles throughout the jar after a few days at room temperature and are a good sign.

In large vegetables like chunks of zucchini, the brine will contain bubbles and the vegetables themselves will only have a slightly "bubbly" flavor. Other ferments that use vegetables with more surface area, like salsa, will have an almost carbonated flavor throughout. This carbonation is normal and can be quite tasty.

Sour Aroma

"The nose knows" is very true when it comes to fermentation. Opening the fermentation vessel after a few days may release a sour, vinegary aroma. While the aroma may be strong at first, it should be pleasant.

If, on the other hand, your sauerkraut smells like spoiled or rotten food, discard it, clean the container thoroughly, and try again another day.

Flavour

Finally, once the vegetable ferment appears gaseous or bubbly and smells sour but pleasing, it's time to taste. Depending on the type of vegetable, varying ranges of fermented flavours may be present.

Larger vegetables, whole or pieces, like cucumber pickles, can take a much longer time to fully ferment and develop a tangy flavor. A mash up of small vegetable pieces like sauerkraut or relish usually takes on a fermented flavor more quickly.

Taste vegetables daily until they reach the flavour and texture that you prefer. At that point, it's time for cold storage.

Fermenting vegetables at home can be so rewarding. Trust your instincts and enjoy your first batch of fermented vegetables.

