

Fermented Pickles

Reading your jars, from first bubble to the fridge

You packed the jars with salt, water, and cucumbers, capped them with a pickle pipe or airlock, and set them on the counter. Now comes the part nobody shows you: how to read what is happening inside the glass. Keep this by the crock.

IS IT WORKING?

Signs your ferment is alive and doing its job.

- **Bubbles** cling to the cucumbers and rise when you nudge the jar. With an airlock the gas vents out the top, so watch the brine, not the lid.
- **Cloudy brine** is normal and good. It goes from clear to hazy as the culture builds. This is the most common thing beginners mistake for trouble. It is not.
- **Color and texture shift** from bright green and waxy to a softer olive, with a little give when pressed.

KAHM YEAST VS. MOLD

A white film on top is almost always harmless. Learn the difference before you throw anything away.

SKIM IT • KEEP GOING

Kahm yeast

White, flat, filmy. Sometimes wrinkled or dusty looking. Harmless. Skim it off with a clean spoon and carry on. The airlock makes it far less likely to begin with.

TOSS THE BATCH

Mold

Fuzzy and raised, in green, black, blue, or pink. This one you do not save. When in doubt, start a fresh jar. It costs pennies.

IS THIS SAFE?

Yes. The salt and the acid your ferment produces make the jar a hostile place for anything that could hurt you. This is one of the oldest and safest ways people have preserved food. **Trust your nose.** A clean sour smell means it is working. If it ever smells rotten or truly wrong, listen to that and start over.

HWL KITCHEN LEDGER

HOW SOUR DO YOU LIKE IT?

There is no "done." It is ready when you like it. Once it is active, taste every day or two.

DAYS 3-5 Half-sour Crisp and bright, barely tangy, still tastes like fresh cucumber.	DAYS 6-10 Medium Sour has arrived, cucumber still present. The middle road most people love.	DAYS 10 AND ON Full-sour Deep, puckery, fully transformed. The classic old-fashioned sour pickle.
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Ranges are a guide, not a rule. A warm kitchen ferments faster, a cool one slower.

HOW TO STOP AND STORE

- **Stop it.** When it tastes right, swap the pickle pipe or airlock for a solid lid and move the jar to the fridge. Cold does not kill the ferment, it slows it way down. The fridge is your pause button.
- **Store it.** Keep the cucumbers under the brine. They hold for months in the fridge, creeping just slightly more sour over time.

DO NOT DUMP THAT BRINE

It is alive, and it is a head start for your next batch.

- Drop **fresh spears, carrots, green beans, onion, or garlic** straight into the leftover brine. It ferments faster because the culture is already established.
- A splash of finished brine also lifts a salad dressing, potato salad, or a cold glass on a hot day.

TRACK YOUR BATCH

DATE STARTED	WHAT'S IN THE JAR	DAY TASTED	HOW SOUR	NOTES FOR NEXT TIME

Trust your nose, taste as you go, and pull them when they taste like yours.

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