

On a bench under the window of the little room where one enters our cabin stand four colored jars. But, really, the jars are not colored at all. They are clear glass containers, a two quart jar and three that hold a gallon each. But, the contents are of various hues. One is a soft yellow; the next in the row is bright magenta; then comes a pale green with tiny flecks of black, and the final jar holds contents that are a little “greener” than its neighbor, but with spots of bright orange and tiny flecks of red.

These glass containers all hold sauerkraut of different kinds at different stages of fermentation. When they are finished and ready to eat, their colors will have become more muted, but each will still have its original distinctions.

As they rest—in all their various colors and flavors— this bench is the place we let our sauerkraut “work.” After a couple of weeks—more or less, depending on temperature—the cabbage color will be more subdued, and there will be a translucence in the finished product. But, the test to really see if the sauerkraut is ready is taste. And, not all of us have the same reaction to the flavors. Some people like their sauerkraut just a touch sour and not too salty, and there are those like us who enjoy the sharp flavor and salty taste produced by a little more salt and more time in the jar or fermenting crock. A lot of people reject any and all kinds of sauerkraut, though I have never been able to understand this.

The kinds of sauerkraut we make vary from year to year, depending on the ingredients we have in the garden. If cabbage heads are large and tight, if there are other vegetables that would enhance the flavor of the kraut, we might make several kinds. This year, we are trying a couple of new sauerkraut recipes.

Already in the freezer are a batch of red cabbage sauerkraut and one of *curtido*, a Latin American recipe that includes onion, garlic, carrots, and hot pepper flakes. These are two of our favorite sauerkrauts.

In the jars on the bench, “working” (fermenting) now, are a couple of kinds of sauerkraut we are attempting to make for the first time. The two quart jar holds shredded rutabaga, “beggies” to us. That will be interesting to try. A gallon container is filled with a combination of savoyed (curly) cabbage, thinly sliced garden leeks, and a little cracked black pepper—also with salt, of course. And one jar has cabbage, leeks, carrots, garlic, and red pepper flakes.

We freeze our sauerkraut in small amounts, and we eat it fresh and chilled from the refrigerator. Many people store their sauerkraut in tight jars in a cool place, and others process it in the canner. The nutritional values of all of these methods vary, but we eat sauerkraut for the flavor and for the zest it gives to winter meals, and thawed from the freezer tastes best to us.

Are we done with sauerkraut for the season? Probably not. There are several heads of cabbage yet in the garden, and I would like to experiment with celeriac kraut, blaukraut (cabbage with some shredded

beets), and some other fermented garden dishes such as chimichurri sauce. But, we also keep some heads of red cabbage for other favorite dishes. The Mammoth Red Rock cabbage that we grow keep for a long time, and far into the winter we can enjoy sweet and sour red cabbage with apples and bacon. Red cabbage slaw will be on the menu, too.

Sauerkraut is only one of many fermented foods that a lot of us eat regularly. Though the processes of fermentation that produce wines and beers are interesting to me, I don't much like the taste. But, there is a much more important fermented product that I eat every day. And anyone who is fascinated by the power of fermentation will enjoy baking naturally leavened breads. That said, it is time to turn on the oven. The two loaves rising in the linen lined baskets will soon be ready to tip out onto the floured baking peel and eased onto the pizza stone in the oven. The aroma of baking bread will soon follow.

