

Vegan Kefir Grains Overview

What is vegan kefir?

- Often called water kefir, the grains are not grains at all! They are a SCOBY – Symbiotic Culture of Bacteria and Yeasts. Live kefir grains look like translucent pebbles.
- These grains eat the sugar in a food, leaving behind a more nutritious dish because of the lactic acid and beneficial bacteria the fermentation process adds.
- Kefir is an ancient cultured food rich in amino acids, enzymes, calcium, magnesium, phosphorus and B vitamins. It is typically a dairy product, but dairy kefir grains are different. Water kefir grains are vegan. We have figured out innovative ways to use water-kefir grains to pickle and ferment so many things including soda, yogurt, pickles, ketchup, mustard salsa and more.
- Vegan kefir grains come in two types: Pure live grains and powdered culture starter. (The powdered culture starter uses natural dextrose as a carrier that is consumed during the process of fermentation).

Why do I want to make kefir?

- Kefir means "feel good" in Turkish. As a fermented food, it is a key to your longevity and good health! When consumed frequently, it boosts your ability to digest all your foods more efficiently. Because it is a fermented food, kefir increases the vitamin content of the foods fermented with it. An absolute must after antibiotic use, kefir also has proven anti-cancer and strong immune-boosting properties.
- Easy and fun to make at home, it is superior to any commercial vegan kefir products.
- Adding kefir grains or kefir water to a sauce will extend the life of that sauce up to several weeks and months! This can help you more effectively use bulk ingredients and save money.

What is the difference between live grains and kefir culture starter?

- The most noticeable difference is the live grains can be used for a lifetime. Powdered kefir grains can be used up to about 8 times before you need to discard them.
- Live grains come wet if you purchase them or get them from a friend. Sometimes you can also buy them dry (dehydrated) and then you add water to them at home to get them wet and living again. Live kefir grains grow and multiply as you use them. Therefore, they make a great gift for your ferment-curious friends. Live grains can be eaten, though usually they are removed from your dish before you eat it so you can reuse the grains. Pets and babies love food that is fermented from kefir, and even the grains themselves.
- Kefir culture starter is a product created by the company Body Ecology. You use one envelope of kefir starter to begin (see below). From there, 1/4 cup of a previous batch will ferment 1 quart of liquid up to 7 times more. After 7 times, you discard the starter and begin again with a new envelope.

Getting started with live kefir grains

- If your grains are wet, you don't need to do anything special to them. Just follow a recipe to make what you like.
- If your live grains came to you dry, soak them in warm water for a few hours. They will plump up and be ready to use.
- When you are not using your grains, you can keep them in a bottle with water in the fridge. They will sit in this "hotel" until you use them again or give them away. Alternatively, you can dehydrate the grains and store them in a glass container.

Getting started with Body Ecology Kefir Starter:

For initial usage:

- Into a container (preferably glass), mix together the entire contents of one foil package of kefir starter and one quart of slightly warmed coconut water or water sweetened with sugar. The warmth of the water should be about skin temperature or 92 degrees.
- Shake, stir or whip with a whisk to mix well. Put a lid on the container.
- Let this mixture ferment 24-48 hours on the counter. Refrigerate the mixture afterwards.

Then drink this kefir water or use it in any recipe you like.

If you don't use coconut water, you can make kefir water using water sweetened with sugar and dried fruit. See the resources below to get specific recipe ideas.

Remember that regardless of which culture you have, even in your refrigerator the fermentation process continues. Chilling simply slows down the fermentation process.

How do I use kefir?:

You will find recipes all over the internet and in books. My favorite resources include: My "Focus on Fermentation" classes, [Nourishing Traditions](#) by Sally Fallon and the website [Nourished Kitchen](#)

- **Soda:** The most basic way to use kefir grains. Soda can be made using coconut water or water sweetened with basic sugar (the kefir eats the sugar, you don't.) The natural fermentation process using kefir grains also makes excellent natural ginger ale, root beer, lemonade, "oringina" and more.
- **Yogurt:** I will teach you how in my "Focus on Fermentation" classes. You can also find a recipe and video demonstration at my website rawbayarea.com
- **Savories:** Sauerkraut and other pickled vegetables including cucumbers, grape leaves, turnips, lemons, jalapenos and more!
- **Condiments:** Salsa, Ketchup, Mustard, Chutney, Horseradish, Jam and much more.

You can substitute an equal amount of live kefir grains or kefir water in any recipe that calls for whey. You can also add kefir to most fermenting recipes, even if it doesn't call for any starter at all. In this case, the kefir grains will simply make the fermenting process go a little more smoothly.

If you are using live kefir grains to make soda, you can strain the grains when your soda is done. They are completely reusable and they will grow. It is not as easy to strain your grains if you are using them in savorys and condiments, so you may end up eating quite a few of your grains. That is just fine. They are great to eat, and good for your pets too.

Where can I find kefir grains?

- Come to my classes, I carry both types of kefir.
- On-line sources for live grains include: [Yemoos](#), [Zoe](#) the Kefir Mom and [Marilyn](#) the Kefir Lady
- Find your Body Ecology Kefir Starter on-line [here](#)

Anything else I should know about kefir?

You will know that you are doing things right with your kefir grains when they start to grow bigger and multiply – and you are happy with the result of your fermented item. If any mold ever appears, you should discard your batch and start again.

Kefir grains usually do their fermenting within 2 days – 1 week, which means you will need to use them in a new batch of ingredients frequently. You may find that you don't want to keep up with this rapid schedule. Live kefir grains will slow down their growth, and survive, in the refrigerator. They also can be dehydrated and kept in a glass container.

If you are the type of person who does not like to tend cultures, Body Ecology's Starter may be a nice option. After 8 generations you can take a complete break. Whereas, live culture grains can be used for life.

If you want to make things with kefir, but don't have grains or starter, play with using water and probiotic powder. Sometimes that works well. Alternatively, veggie culture starter can sometimes work well in some recipes.

If you have live culture you don't want anymore, or more grains than you can use, please get in touch with me. Likely, I can give them to other students.