



Best Cabbage for Sauerkraut: How To Choose, Buy, and Store



Learn how to select the best cabbage for sauerkraut and use my buying tips to pick the right head. The right cabbage will ferment into the best sauerkraut.

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Learn About MakeSauerkraut!



If you are fearful of poisoning your family with your ferments, frustrated by mold, or just looking to



Whether you are making your first batch of sauerkraut or have made many batches and are trying to perfect the fermentation process, selecting the right cabbage is key.

Perhaps you have had great success with previous batches of sauerkraut and all of a sudden, a batch goes south, [growing mold and tasting nasty. What went wrong?](#)

improve your gut health, I'm here to help.

I'm Holly and I help people learn how to safely transform everyday vegetables into healthy and delicious fermented foods that are safe to eat and delicious, easy to add to meals, and will supecharge gut health.

My goal is to elevate the health of one million households by helping each and every one of you learn to safely ferment flavorful foods.

Through my passion for fermentation, your eagerness to learn the world's oldest method of preservation and storage, and the help of millions of mighty microbes, we'll get there... one jar at a time.

[Read more about MakeSauerkraut!](#)

Learn How To Make Sauerkraut

Does the type of cabbage you select or the time of year you ferment make a difference?

You bet it does!

Let's find out not only about picking the perfect cabbage for stellar fermentation success but just how beneficial cabbage... and sauerkraut are for you.

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Nutritional Benefits of Cabbage

Cabbage is a cruciferous vegetable belonging to the mustard family, *Brassicaceae*. You'll also find kohlrabi, kale, broccoli, brussels sprouts, and cauliflower in this family. There are many advantages to including this superfood in your diet.

Reduce the risk of cancer. Cabbage is a nutrition powerhouse. Studies support that **cruciferous vegetables reduce the risk of cancer** due to the presence of sulforaphane, a compound that causes their strong and bitter taste. Sulforaphane supports the body's production of detoxification enzymes.

Vitamins and minerals. Aside from its anti-cancer properties, cabbage is also packed with vitamins and minerals like Vitamin C, K, and B6, Folate, and Manganese. Vitamin C in cabbage helps reduce



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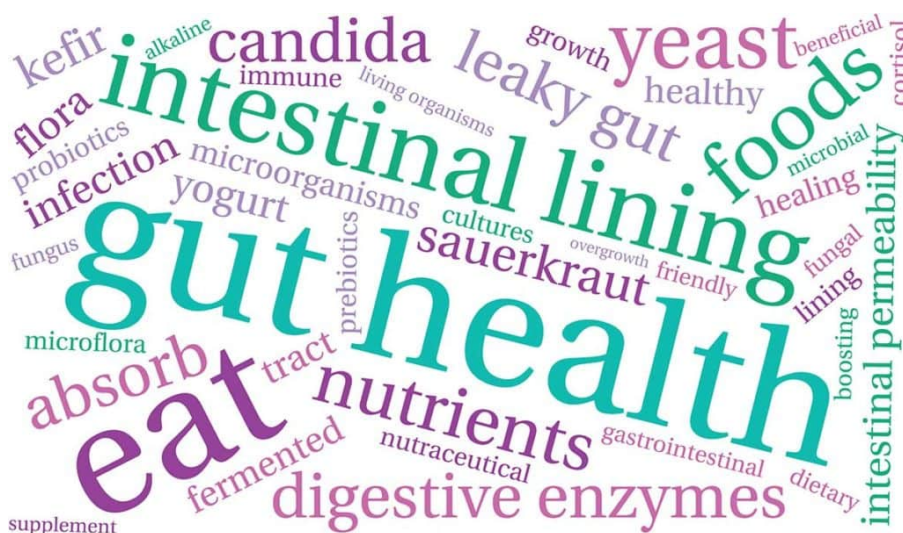
How Much Salt Do I Use to Make Sauerkraut?

inflammation, boosts immunity, promotes skin elasticity, and overall health.

Antioxidants. The presence of antioxidants protects our cells from free radicals, which are linked to diseases like cancer and Alzheimer's. Moreover, the fiber and water content of cabbage helps in digestion and the removal of toxins from the body.

Gut health. Cabbage is also a rich stimulant for digestive enzymes and will stimulate a healthy balance of stomach acid.

Added Benefits of Fermented Cabbage (Sauerkraut)



Found in sauerkraut: probiotics, increased levels of vitamin C, acetylcholine for digestion, and much much more.

When fermented, cabbage has even more health and **nutritional benefits** compared to raw or cooked cabbage.

Sauerkraut contains natural probiotics or good live

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bacteria that help remove the extra bad bacteria in the body, and thus, maintain a healthy balance of microbes. This promotes good digestion, strengthens the immune system, and controls inflammation.

Naturally Fermented Pickles [The Complete Guide]

A **study** showed that fermentation even increased the antioxidant properties (vitamin c levels) of red cabbages.

Acetylcholine, an organic chemical found in sauerkraut, aids in digestion and bowel movement. The lactic acid produced in cabbage fermentation increases lactic acid which inhibits bad bacteria.

Sauerkraut is one of the superfoods with the highest vitamin C content. Red cabbage sauerkraut has about 700 mg of vitamin C, which is ten times the recommended amount for daily intake.

These are only a few of the **reasons why you should eat a forkful of sauerkraut daily.**

Best Cabbage for Fermentation

Most cabbage varieties can be fermented. But the common, green, round-headed cabbages are most often used to make sauerkraut and will give you the best results.

Green Cabbage



Green Cabbage

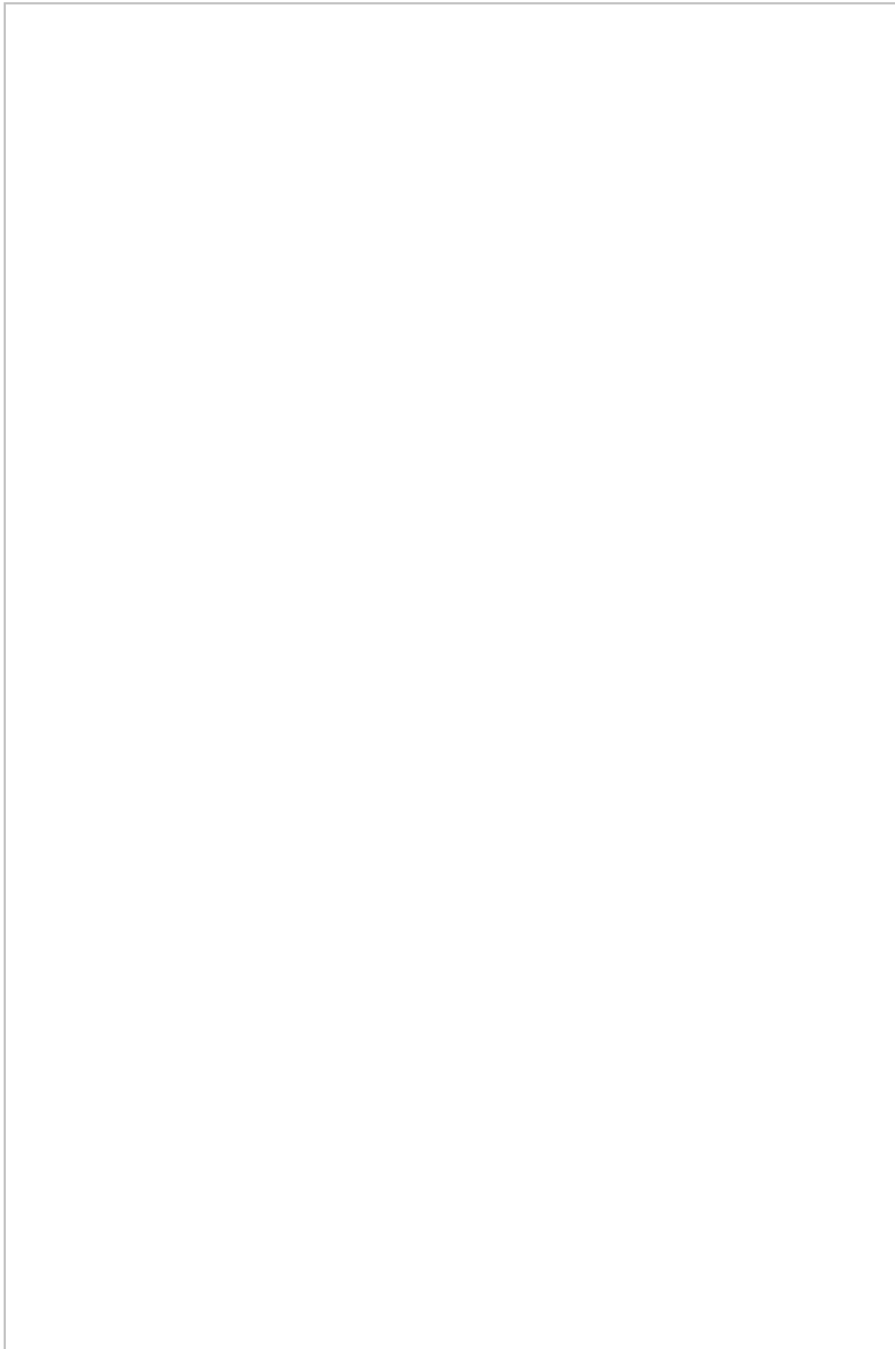
Green cabbage, which is sometimes called white cabbage, is my favorite when it comes to making sauerkraut. It has wide fan-like leaves that are pale green in color.

I almost always use the traditional round-headed green cabbage, because it is commonly grown by my local farmers, has a nice texture, and retains most of its crunch throughout the fermentation

process.

If you are starting with your first batch of sauerkraut, I recommend that you start with green cabbage. It ferments fabulously, which is one more way to guarantee success, and it gives you a baseline to gauge how future batches are fermenting.

Red Cabbage



Red cabbage has a maroon or purple color, thus, some call it purple cabbage. It has an earthier and stronger flavor compared to green cabbage. Its dark color suggests that it is a healthier option. Red cabbage contains more nutrients, like Vitamin C, Vitamin A, and iron than green cabbage.

In fact, red cabbage has one of the highest levels of naturally available vitamin C, which is 30% more than that of green cabbage, and even more than the vitamin C content of oranges! One reason why many like to use red cabbage for fermentation.

A compound called anthocyanins gives red cabbage—as well as blueberries, Concord grapes, and black tomatoes—its distinctive dark color. Anthocyanins act as antioxidants and are believed to have anti-inflammatory properties. Researchers from Cornell University found that **raw and fermented red cabbage has the highest antioxidant capacity** compared to other cabbage varieties.

Ready to reap the **impressive benefits of red or purple cabbage**? Try this **red cabbage sauerkraut recipe**!

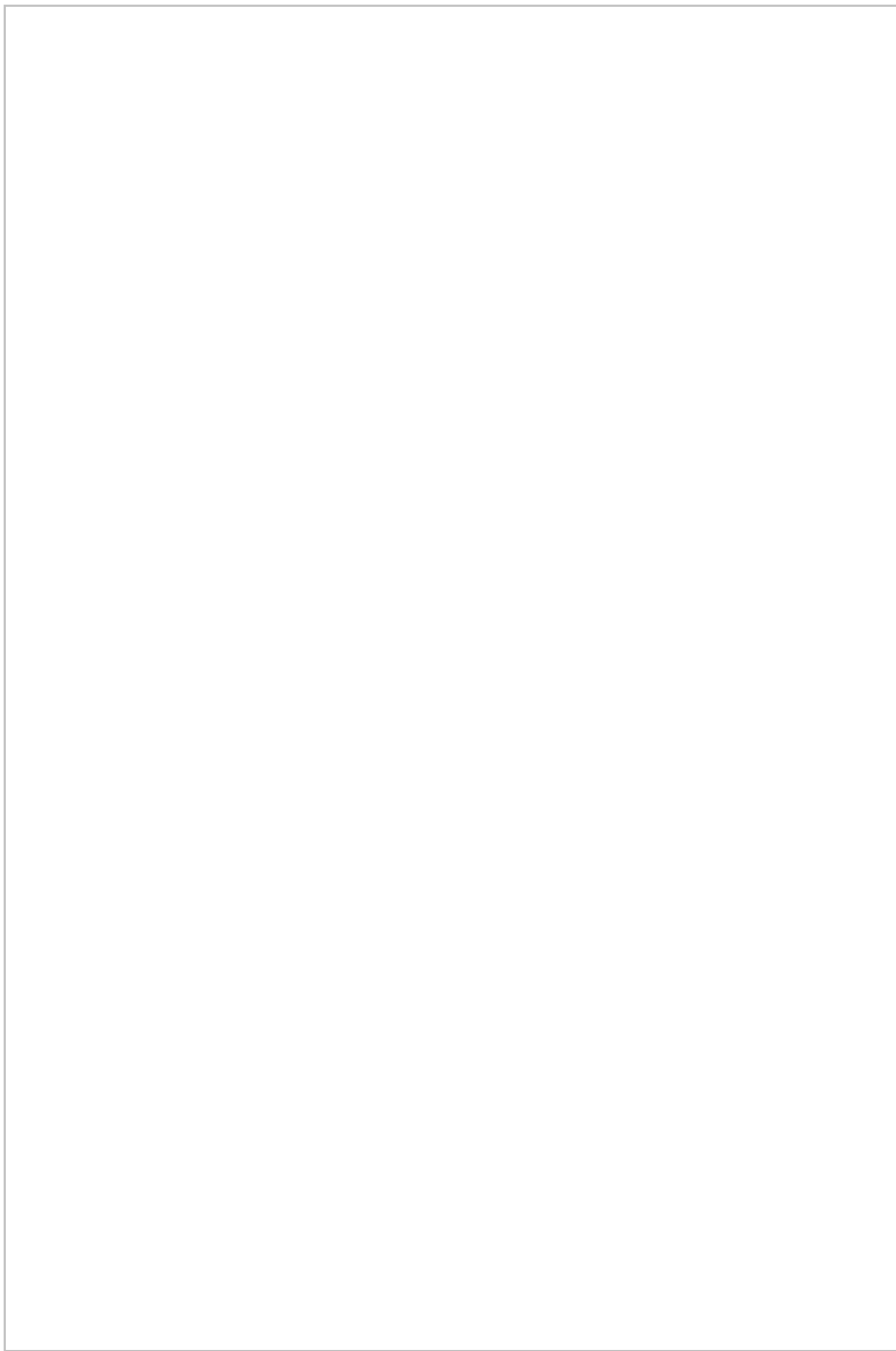
Savoy Cabbage



Savoy cabbage is similar to green cabbage, but its leaves are of a darker green color, ruffled, tender, and less densely packed together.

It ferments more quickly than common green cabbage and you'll end up with softer sauerkraut. I rarely, if ever, use savoy cabbage for fermentation.

Napa Cabbage



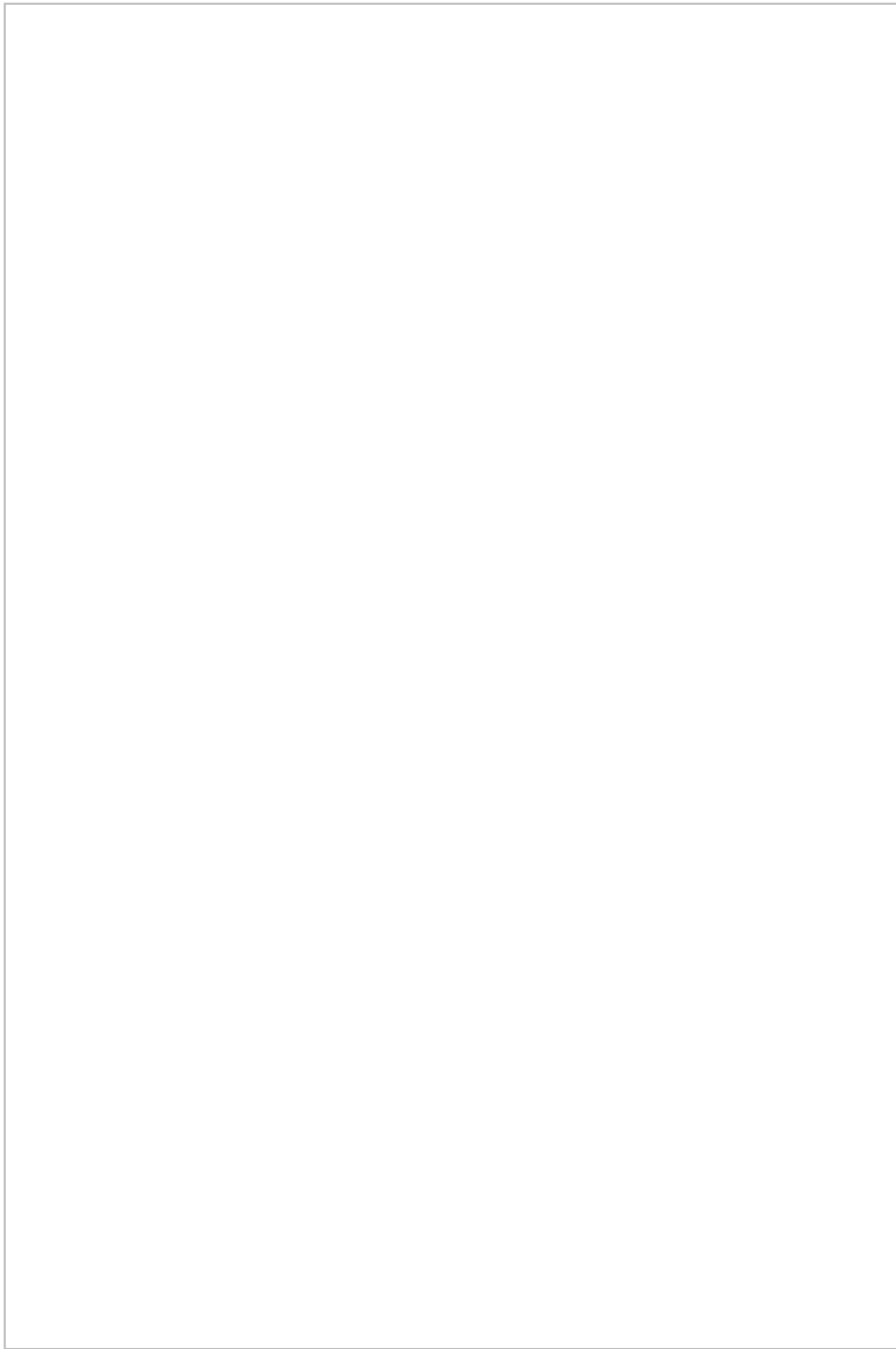
Another type of cabbage that is more commonly used for **Kimchi** and other Asian cuisine is Napa cabbage, also called Chinese cabbage. It is oblong-shaped with white stalks and crinkly, light yellow to pale green leaves. Compared to the first three types of cabbage, Napa cabbage is softer and has a milder flavor.

These are only four out of the many cabbage

varieties that you can ferment. No matter what type of cabbage you use, sauerkraut is best made with fresh cabbage or the newly harvested ones.

And, we are fortunate that cabbage stores well and you can successfully ferment with it throughout the year. However, if you are getting less than stellar results with your sauerkraut, I find that the use of old cabbage that has been stored for many months is often the culprit.

Selecting cabbage



Whether you buy your cabbage from the market, from a local farmer, or **grow your own cabbage**, selecting good quality produce will do wonders for your sauerkraut's flavor and texture. Here's what to look for when selecting a head of cabbage.

✓ **Firm and compact**

Choose cabbage heads that are firm, compact, and

dense, or heavy for their size. These are signs that the cabbage is fresh. A soft and spongy cabbage may be rotten inside.

✓ **Sweet flavor and odor**

If possible, taste a few slices of the raw cabbage. Choose the cabbage that is sweet to taste and stay away from bitter cabbage. The stronger the odor and flavor, the older the cabbage. The sugars in sweet-tasting cabbage aid the fermentation process and result in a greater depth of flavor in your sauerkraut.

✓ **Bright, shiny, and crisp leaves**

Another way to evaluate the freshness of cabbage is through its leaves. Choose cabbage heads with bright-colored, shiny, and crisp leaves. Make sure that they are not wilted, brown or blemished. Some cabbage sellers may take out the wilted outer leaves. It's best to avoid those. In that case, you can check if the leaves are compact and not beginning to separate from the stem.

✓ **Fresh and newly-harvested**

When cabbage is picked and stored for a while, it dries out and loses moisture. Sauerkraut made using this kind of cabbage has less brine. Fresh cabbage will be teeming with beneficial bacteria and will enable you to have a successful ferment.

✓ **Whole cabbage instead of precut or shredded**

It is not advisable to buy precut cabbage because it begins to lose its vitamin C content from the moment it is cut. Shredded cabbage or cabbage in bags are also more expensive. In addition, some of the bagged cabbages are treated with preservatives that could interfere with fermentation.

✓ Organic

It is always best to use organic produce for sauerkraut because the nutrients in cabbage and other vegetables are retained. Cabbage loses its nutrients when sprayed with pesticides.

But depending on where you are, organic cabbage may not be easily accessible or affordable. In that case, it might be comforting to know that cabbage is part of the [Environmental Working Group's "Clean 15"](#), which is a list of fruits and vegetables with the lowest concentrations of pesticides.

Also, pesticide residues and other toxins may be broken down and degraded during fermentation as shown in the 2008 study by the Iranian Agricultural Engineering Research Institute and a [2009 study by the Gyeongsang National University in Korea](#).

This is why, technically, sauerkraut is safer to eat than coleslaw or fresh green salad. This is not to say that you should stop eating salads but instead don't be fearful of eating something left to ferment on your counter for days, if not weeks. In addition to pesticide residues being degrading during fermentation, pathogenic bacteria are been killed off

by the bacteria responsible for fermentation.

Cabbage Buying Guide

Here is a summary of what type of cabbage to buy and what not to buy to have top quality cabbage for your sauerkraut:

	Top Quality	Not Top Quality
Cabbage Head	Firm, dense, heavy for its size Whole head of cabbage	Soft and spongy Precut or shredded cabbage
Leaves	Compact leaves; bright, shiny, and crispy	Leaves are separating from the head; wilted, blemished, brown
Flavor and Odor	Sweet flavor and odor	Bitter or strong flavor and odor
Freshness	Fresh and newly-harvested	Stored for a time
How cabbage was grown	Organic	Sprayed with pesticides

Remember that the better the quality of your

ingredients for your sauerkraut, the healthier and more flavorful it will be. The nutrients in the vegetables are the food of the good bacteria that help in the fermentation process. Feed them well.

Winter vs. Summer Cabbage

Though cabbage is available all year round, it is best to use winter cabbage that first appears on store shelves and in markets in late fall.

When you first start learning to ferment, you most likely will just grab whatever cabbage is available and whatever time of year you are fermenting. As time goes on, however, work to “level-up” your fermentation skills and start gravitating towards fermenting in the late fall with freshly-harvested winter cabbage.

Winter Cabbage

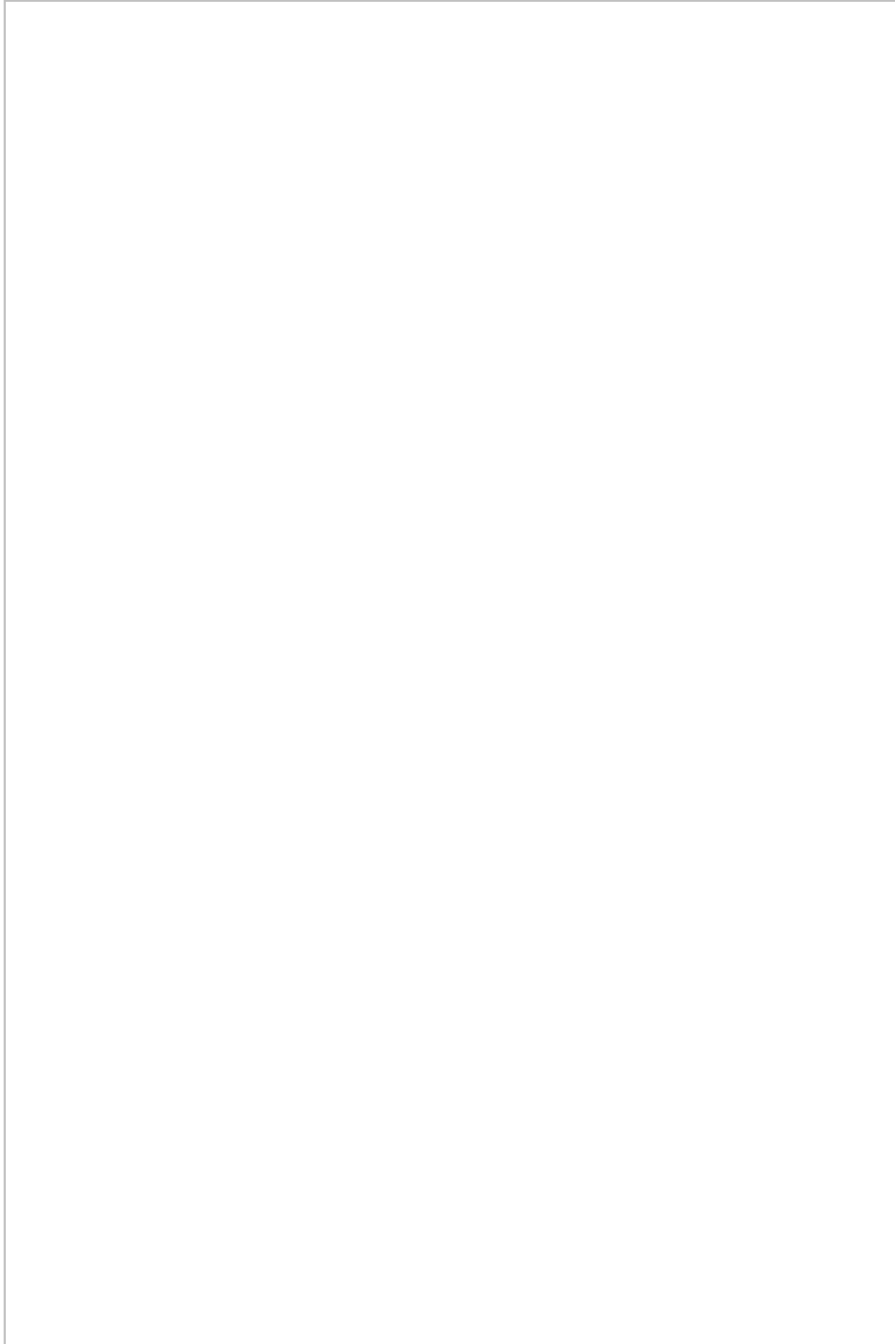


Notice how tightly packed the cabbage leaves are with winter cabbage.

Winter cabbage, which is sown in late summer and harvested in late fall (usually, after a few nights of frost), has a higher moisture content which is ideal for sauerkraut. It grows slower than summer cabbage and has thicker leaves. Cabbage also reacts to cold conditions and frost by producing sugars, making it taste rather sweet.

When you cut open winter cabbage, you'll notice that the leaves are compact and tight with little or no hollow space between them. In addition, winter cabbage will feel quite heavy for its size, often 1 – 2 times heavier than summer cabbage of the same size.

Summer Cabbage



With summer cabbage, the leaves are usually in loose layers.

Summer cabbage, on the other hand, generally has lower moisture content. It is sown in early spring and harvested throughout the summer. It grows faster than winter cabbage and has thinner leaves.

When you cut open summer cabbage, you'll notice that the leaves are loose with hollow space between them.

How to Store Cabbage

If you have purchased cabbage that you're not able to use right away, here are some suggestions for storing it. You also might be fortunate enough to grow your own and are looking for storage ideas before it can all be processed into sauerkraut.

On the counter, a cabbage head can only last for a few days. Store cabbage in a cool and damp place to prolong its life. Some nutrients in cabbage are susceptible to heat. Thus, avoid storing cabbage under direct sunlight.

What is the best way to keep cabbage fresh?

Refrigerator storage. When storing cabbage in the fridge, remove brown or damaged leaves. Wrapping the cabbage tightly in plastic and storing it in the crisper will make it last longer for up to about 2 weeks. You might notice a slight odor on the cabbage after some time, but it is still good to use. Wrapping the cabbage in a damp paper towel first before putting it in plastic will also help retain its

moisture.

When cabbage is cut open, it can only last for about 2-3 days. To extend its life, you can store halves of cut cabbage in a sealed plastic bag or container then refrigerate.

Root cellar. Store cabbage in a cool and dark area. For those who have a root cellar, wrap the cabbage heads individually in paper and store them separately.

Fermenting. Fermenting cabbage into sauerkraut is a great way to preserve cabbage for longer periods of time, and to get a lot of nutritional benefits. All you need is fresh cabbage and salt!

There you have it. Now, you know what to look for when selecting cabbage for fermentation. Grab a head and start fermenting.

If you are just a beginner in fermenting, try this [simple sauerkraut recipe](#). Or, [select one of these many recipes](#).

Cabbage into Sauerkraut: Frequently Asked Questions

What type of cabbage makes the best sauerkraut?

Traditional round-headed green cabbage, which is sometimes called white cabbage, is my favorite when it comes to making sauerkraut and is what is

commonly found at the grocery store. It has wide fan-like leaves that are pale green in color.

In addition, green cabbage is usually grown by my local farmers, has a nice texture, and retains most of its crunch throughout the fermentation process.

Do you wash cabbage before making sauerkraut?

You don't need to wash or rinse the cabbage. Just remove any outer leaves that are browned or damaged. Removing the outer leaves is enough. As you slice your cabbage, keep an eye out for any dark bits.

Can you use store-bought cabbage for sauerkraut?

Any cabbage will work for sauerkraut, but I find I get the best results with regular green cabbage.



Holly Howe, Fermentation Educator

Holly Howe has been learning about and perfecting the art of fermentation since 2002.

Her mission is dedicated to helping families welcome the powerful bacterial world into their homes in order to ferment delicious gut-healing foods.

She is the author of *Fermentation Made Easy!* *Mouthwatering Sauerkraut*, and creator of the online program *Ferment Like a Pro!*

Read more about her [HERE](#).



7 Fermentation Mistakes You Might Be Making

And... how to avoid them.

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are you
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