



Safety & Prep

How To Tell If Your Ferment Is Spoiled

Are you afraid you won't know if your sauerkraut or pickles are spoiled?

Well, welcome to the club! Like you, I was raised not to leave food sitting out on the counter. ALL food had to be stored in the refrigerator or went bad and could make you sick.

I've had to battle this conditioning since I started making fermented foods years ago.

One of the big challenges that I faced and you're probably facing now, is being able to tell the difference between spoiled ferments and good ferments.

Below are the steps you can take to determine if your ferment is spoiled or not.

How to tell if your ferment is spoiled vs. not spoiled

Step By Step

How to tell it's spoiled vs. not spoiled

LESSON 2 // HOW TO TELL IF YOUR FERMENT IS SPOILED// FERMENTING VEGGIES

Step 1 – Take A Look

Step 1 - Look

A spoiled ferment may look uneven in color, brown, pink or moldy.



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A spoiled ferment may look uneven in color. For example half of it could look brown while the rest looks dull in color. This could be due to uneven salt distribution in the veggies. The brown part is lacking salt.

If there is a layer of brown sauerkraut, you can scrape it out and toss it. Usually the sauerkraut underneath the brown layer is fine to eat. Go to the next step to determine if it's safe.

How it should look: A good ferment will become dull in color and the brine will be cloudy.

Step 1 - Look

A good ferment will become dull in color and the brine will be cloudy.



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In this photo the pickle brine is cloudy and the cucumbers are a dull green color.

Step 2 – Check The Surface

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Is there mold? Mold is round, black, blue and fuzzy.



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Check the surface of your sauerkraut or pickles. Is there mold? Mold is round, black or blue and fuzzy. Typical to what you see on any rotting vegetables. It's easy to recognize.

What to do?

Some people simply scrape the mold off the surface. Everything under the brine is fine. Some people are very sensitive to mold or it grosses them out enough to throw it out and start over. It's up to you how you want to handle mold on the surface.

If there is mold inside the kraut or pickles, then throw it out and start over.

Otherwise, move on to the next step.

Step 2 - Check The Surface

Is there a white, milky substance on the surface?

This is kahm yeast, which is harmless.



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If there is a white milky substance on the surface, it's Kahm Yeast. Kahm Yeast is wild yeast and is totally safe. Simply scrape it off the surface. The ferment is safe.

You can learn more about Kahm Yeast in my post, [“What Is That White Milky Stuff On My Fermented Veggies?”](#).

Step 3 - Smell it

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It should NOT smell

- Rancid
- Like Alcohol

It should smell

- Pleasantly sour

*If kahm yeast is present it might have a strong smell.
Simply scrape it off.

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A spoiled ferment will smell rancid, like rotting broccoli. A good ferment will have a pleasant sour smell.

Note: If there's Kahm Yeast present it may have a strong smell, but once scraped away it should have a pleasant sour smell if it's not spoiled.

Step 4 - Texture

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A spoiled ferment may be slimy in texture.

A good ferment might be crunchy, firm or soft depending on what you're fermenting.

Pick a piece out of the jar to feel the texture.



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A spoiled ferment may be slimy in texture. Pick a piece out of the jar to feel it.

A good ferment will be crunchy, firm or soft, depending on what you're fermenting.

If it's slimy, let it ferment longer to see if it goes away. Sometimes ferments high in sugar, like ones with beets and carrots in it, will cause the brine to be slimy and thick. This can go away with time.

If it doesn't, then throw it out and start over.

Step 5 - Taste it

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- If it passes all the above tests, taste it.
- The taste test will also tell you if it's ready or needs more time.
- It should taste sour. If not, then give it more time until you like how it tastes.

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If your ferment passes all the above tests, taste it. Take a small piece to try.

I've never had a ferment pass all the above tests and then taste bad or make me sick. So, don't worry.

The taste test will tell you if it's ready or if it needs more time. When it's ready it will taste sour. If it's sour enough for you and you like the texture, then it's ready.

If it's not sour enough or is too crunchy, then let it ferment longer.

When testing pickles, cut a small piece off to try.

What if your ferment is spoiled?

If it's rancid, slimy or has a weird color, toss it in the compost bin and start over.

What happened?

Check the troubleshooting guide for details on what happened and how to avoid it next time.

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If you think your ferment is spoiled and want to know what happened and what to do about it, check the troubleshooting guide available for you to download in this lesson.

Spoiled vs. Not Spoiled Test

Look



Surface



Smell



Texture



Taste

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Up next, I'll teach you how to prevent mold in lesson 3.

Other reads: ["Is There A Risk Of Botulism In Fermented Foods?"](#)