

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

November 7, 2013

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Do You Fancy Fermentation?

Fermented foods are big business these days it seems. The popular press is advertising them as being great for our health. The heritage foods groups are promoting them as being some of the old foods that we used to eat. Of course the manufacturers are more than happy to encourage us to slurp down their foods with added probiotics. And more people are trying to make their own fermented foods at home - everything from sauerkraut and pickles to fermented turnips.

Unfortunately, it's tough to get good results for a lot of fermented foods here in Florida. I spoke recently with a caller who was concerned that even though she took a class with an out of state 'specialist', her pickles did not come out well at all. She followed all the steps correctly. She started them in the class along with everyone else. But when she took them home, they just rotted. What happened?

To make fermented foods we have to encourage some bacteria or molds to grow faster than others. We want the ones that make the flavors we enjoy, or the texture of the foods we like. But it's hard to let some grow while we stop all the others.

You might have noticed that we live surrounded by water. It's hot and humid here in Florida most of the time! We haven't had a good snow here to kill them off for years! These are just the conditions that molds and yeasts love. So we have a large load of molds and yeasts floating around in the air, in our homes, on our clothes all the time. Whether they're the ones we want or not, they are going to take every opportunity to grow. And unfortunately, there are more of the ones we don't want! If the food is moist and warm enough, they'll grow a lot faster than the good guys. So we end up with mushy, or smelly, or gooey, or just plain ugly food.

Traditionally people used salt to control the bad guys. Sauerkraut and dill pickles need a lot of salt that we can't leave out. The salt is the preservative. Without it, the cabbage and cucumbers spoil instead of ferment. But most of us need to be reducing how much salt we eat. So piling on the salt is not a good solution.

Many of the traditional fermented foods originally came from colder countries. A root cellar is a great place. It stays around 50° to 60° F. That will also help keep the bad yeast and molds from growing. But it is expensive to refrigerate our homes to 50° F, and not very comfortable either.

A third problem we have here is that our vegetables are slightly different. Home grown cabbage might be a wonderful place to start. But because it's warmer here, cabbage grown locally doesn't make as much natural sugar as cabbage grown in colder climates. So there's not as much natural food for the good bacteria to grow on. They won't grow as fast as the spoilage yeasts do.

Finally there's the fact that eating probiotics (live, friendly bacteria) in food doesn't help us much, or for very long. Unless we keep eating them over and over, pretty soon they're gone from our intestinal tracts again. There is not much evidence that they really help healthy people. They can be dangerous to people with some kinds of intestinal problems.

What is much more helpful to our health is eating prebiotics. These are foods that encourage the growth of the good bacteria we all ready have inside us. Prebiotics are fruits, vegetables, beans and whole grains that have fiber. Our friendly bacteria love to grow on fiber naturally present in these foods. Added fibers in the high fiber bars and cereals don't interest them much. So rather than trying to grow bacteria in fermented foods, eat the foods your bacteria like, and they'll grow quickly where they do the most good - inside you! This is an interesting way to add beans to your meals. Enjoy!

#### Shanghai Salad

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|---|------------------------------------|
| 1 3-oz pkg ramen noodles                                | 1 red or green sweet pepper, diced |
| 1 cup chopped cooked chicken                            | 2 Tbsp slivered almonds            |
| 1 15-oz can low-salt black beans                        | 1 head green leaf lettuce          |
| ½ cup ginger-sesame or other Oriental flavored dressing |                                    |

Spray a baking sheet with cooking spray. Break noodles into pieces and spread on sheet. Add almonds. Bake at 350° F for 5 min, until light brown, stirring once. Cool. Wash and drain lettuce. Tear into bite-size pieces. Empty beans into strainer, rinse well, and drain. Put half the noodles, the almonds, chicken, pepper, beans and lettuce into large bowl. Add dressing and toss. Top with rest of noodles. Serves 5 as main dish.

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