

Ginger Beer Bug

It is incredibly satisfying making your own ginger beer bug, and it never ceases to amaze me how by combining three ingredients together a whole living organism can be created. Essentially when you are making a bug such as this, you are harnessing the yeast in the unpeeled ginger and giving it life by feeding it with sugar and oxygenating it in water. If kept in a relatively warm spot, fermentation will take place in a matter of days. You will then have a ginger beer bug that will need to be kept warm and well fed!

Ingredients

- Fresh ginger, preferably spray free or organic (keep the skin on)
- Raw sugar
- Unchlorinated tap water, preferably filtered or rainwater

Method

1. Begin by taking $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water and placing it into a jar with a teaspoon of grated ginger and a teaspoon of raw sugar. Give it a good mix and place a lid on top but don't tighten it, you just want it sitting on the top of the jar to allow fermentation to begin. Put in a warm place out of direct sunlight - I find the top of the fridge is a good area to keep it.
2. Every day at around the same time add another teaspoon of grated ginger and another teaspoon of raw sugar and stir in well.
3. After 5 days or so you should begin to see bubbles. When this happens, up the measurements to a tablespoon of grated ginger, a heaped teaspoon of raw sugar and a splash of water (about 40-50 ml), always remembering to stir your bug well each time you feed it.
4. Continue feeding every day in this fashion until you have an active bubbly bug – this could take another 5 or so days. A good sign your bug is healthy is if you see the ginger floating on top, and if you can hear the bubbles when you remove the lid. Once it is at this stage, your bug is ready to use.
5. The day before you are going to make ginger beer, feed your bug twice about 6 hours apart, and then feed it again the morning of the day you are planning on making ginger beer. This will ensure you have a very active bug to work with.

Ginger beer bug maintenance

- During the warmer months feed your bug once a day, as the warm weather will mean the bug will eat up the sugar faster than in cold weather. In winter you may only want to feed it every 2-3 days. This all depends, however, on the warmth of the area you are keeping it - if you have your bug living next to a fire all winter you may find it still needs feeding once a day.
- Whenever you empty bug out to make ginger beer, always feed the remaining bug in the jar straight away.
- You can store the bug in the fridge for around a week if you are going away – just make sure you feed it directly before refrigerating. When you return, pull the bug out of the fridge and let it

come to room temperature before resuming your feeding regime. It will take a few days to become really active and bubbly again, but once it does you are ready to resume making ginger beer.

Trouble shooting tips

- If you notice your bug becomes darker and starts taking on a vinegary smell, tip over half of it out, feed it, stir it well and take note that maybe you haven't been feeding it enough, or maybe it has gotten too large in volume. A bug that is used often and kept small will always be healthier than a bug that is not used often enough and is allowed to increase too much.
- If you have a large volume of bug but you want to keep it all to make large batches of ginger beer, pour it into 3 or 4 jars instead of one. This way you will have 3 or 4 ginger beer bugs to maintain and feed every day, but you will be able to make much larger quantities of ginger beer, while also keeping your bug healthy and small.