

- Speaker 1: [00:00](#) Welcome to the old fashioned on purpose podcast. Right now my kitchen resembles the laboratory of a mad scientist. There is sourdough starter bubbling away by the oven. There's a container of continuous brew kombucha that's over on my Island, and there is a two gallon crock of sauerkraut fermenting away in the corner. So I have come a very, very long way in this world of fermentation considering that I kind of used to be scared of fermented foods or maybe scared isn't the right term, but I was really, really turned off by not only their smells but how they looked and how they tasted. I'm gonna blame it all on this bottle of beet Kvass I think that's how you say it. It's K V A S S and what it is, if you've never seen it before, it's like this fermented beet drink and I don't remember the brands, but this company was very, very kind and they sent me a box of all these different types of Kvass.
- Speaker 1: [01:11](#) Um, there was beet and green ones and Brown ones. I don't remember all the flavors and I was so excited to get them. They were so horrible. Like, and maybe that's just my perception. I'm sure there's people who love Kvass. It was not for me. I thought it tasted like sour dirt. And after that experience, um, I kinda was like this fermented food thing is not my jam. So the good news is thankfully my mind was changed with sauerkraut. I got to know sauerkraut, I learned how to make up myself. I learned how to make it not crazy sour. And it was more of a mild Tang, which I found out I really liked and my body even craved. So that launched me in the long story short into this world of fermented foods. So I now love fermented foods, I make them all the time, all different varieties.
- Speaker 1: [02:08](#) And in today's episode I want to talk about fermenting crocks. You can do ferments in Mason jars, but you can also do them in Crocks. And I want to talk about how we can use this old fashioned homestead tool and our very modern day kitchens. So keep listening. This is going to be a fun one. I'm your host Jill winger. And for the last 10 years I've been helping people who feel disenchanting by modern life. I'll show you how to create the life you are craving by learning how to grow your own food and master old fashioned skills. So before we get started, I just want to say that you do not have to have a crock to ferment. I have made plenty of different ferments with my trusty Mason jars, like sometimes I use one of those air lock systems. Sometimes I just use a lid.
- Speaker 1: [03:04](#) So do not let the equipment be the obstacle that's keeping you from home fermentation if you really want to try it because it can be very, very simple. So I started with Mason jars, but I then graduated into using a crock just because I've kind of always

been drawn to them. I'm betting you've seen crocks in antique stores or at your grandparents house, they're usually big and heavy. They're made out of stoneware and they have numbers on them. Sometimes they're really, really cool looking, but they also serve a very important purpose in fermentation and we can absolutely still use them to make our fermented foods. Today. So one of, there's a couple of reasons I like Crocks over Mason jars and I still use both, so it's not like I'm exclusively Crocks. Um, but I find there's a few benefits to them. So first off, they're really an heirloom kitchen tool and I love heirloom kitchen tools.

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I like my tools to be things that I could feasibly pass on to a grandchild someday. So I love my wooden spoons and my cast iron skillets and Crocks are right up there with those things. They are heritage, they are durable and they should last a very, very long time. Crocks are also really good for larger scale bulk fermentation. So if you just have a handful of pickles, you don't need a crock, you put those babies in a Mason jar. But if you want to do, you know, many, many pounds of cabbage or a whole lot of pickles, Crocks are going to hold a much larger quantity and you won't have to have as many containers and they're also a little bit easier to fill and to scoop food out of. So that is another benefit and you don't have to try to cram your hand down into the Mason jar.

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They do have a few limitations. They are a little bit more expensive. You can buy Crocks like new Crocks, brand new, even in today's world. My favorite place to get them is from a Lehman's hardware. I'll drop a link to that in the show notes. That's my favorite place to get a lot of homestead tools. They have a fantastic selection of Crocks. They also have this amazing tool called a kraut stomper, which is like so fun. It's like this big wooden mallet and you use it to pound your cabbage. It's just amazing. Anyway. Um, so you can get new Crocks. You could also use older antique crocks. The one downfall to an antique crock that maybe you would inherit from a relative or you got at an antique store is sometimes they have cracks. Um, so you have to be really mindful of that.

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And sometimes they also don't come with lids or weights, which we're gonna talk about in a minute. So you still will need to either improvise those two things or find a place to purchase a company accessories that fit your crock size. Crocks are also a little bit harder to store. You know, they take up more storage space, they take up more space on the counter and they're a little heavier. So if you struggle with mobility or strength, you know, that's going to be something when it, when a two gallon

crock or a three gallon crock is full of sauerkraut or pickles or brine or whatever, it's heavy. Um, you might, you know, either leave it where it is or move it with a lot of caution. So if you have trouble moving things around, probably Crocks are not a great option. So there are a couple types of Crocks.

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If you Google it, if you look on Amazon, you're going to see some different options. There are open Crocks, which are really the style that we're going to see at grandma's house or at antique stores. Just a big open VAT made of stoneware or ceramic. And then there's also water sealed Crocks, water sealed Crocks have a lip around the edge to hold water, and then it has a lid that fits inside the lip. And what this does, it creates a seal to prevent outside air from coming into the crock once you get the water into that lip. So could the carbon dioxide that is created, while things are fermenting inside the crock that can still escape, but no more air can get inside. So it's a little bit more sealed, maybe a little more sanitary. Not that that's a huge issue with fermentation.

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I mean it is, but it isn't. You want to be clean but all of the amazing acid and bacteria and in the ferments keeps things pretty good most of the time. Anyway, that's a little bit of a rabbit trail. But water sealed Crocks are definitely an option. For the purpose of today's podcast, I want them to focus more on the open Crocks. Um, they're a little more affordable, a little more easy to find in some aspects, and that's what I use. So that's what we're talking about. So an open crock. Um, there are a lot of different sizes. The most common sizes are two, three and five gallon. Although you can get smaller ones, you'll just have to decide which size is great for you. Two gallon is great for me it's definitely sufficient. I recently made sauerkraut with my two gallon crock. I think I used three and a half large heads of green cabbage and I only like filled up a little bit more than half of the crock, so definitely plenty of room.

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You do not have to fill it max capacity, you can have them half full as long as you have enough liquid to cover them at that level. With an open crock, and I alluded to this a minute ago, you do have to have some accessories, so you're going need weights and a lid to go with your open crock. The thing I loved about getting my crock new from Lehman's hardware is that I was able to purchase those items that came with it and fit it exactly so I didn't have to go on a wild goose chase to find them. If you are getting a crock as an inheritance or from an antique store, it's going to take a little bit more effort, but it can be done. So the purpose of a weight with a crock is to keep the food underneath the brine because anytime food pokes up

above the brine, that's when it's exposed to the air and that's when it's going to go bad.

Speaker 1: [09:37](#) Your food technically should stay safe and fermenting and doing its thing as long as it's completely covered by liquid. And that's what a weight does. So my crock came with two weights. They're heavy, they're stoneware, and they fit on top of the food right in the crock. If you don't have actual weights, you could also just use any sort of kitchen objects that you have that is clean and heavy. So I wouldn't use a plastic or metal item. But if you have something glass or ceramic, um, that is clean and will fit inside your crock and hold that food down, let's say a plate, that's the right size, that will totally work. You'll also want to either purchase a lid for your crock or improvise a lid. Again, a lid could be a larger plate or a platter that fits over the top. It could also just be a cloth or a towel that you rubber bands or you closepin so it doesn't fall off. We just want to cover it to keep dust and bugs and junk out of the open crock as the food is fermenting.

Speaker 1: [10:48](#) Okay. One note I wanted to mention before we move on, if you are using just a towel or a cloth as a lid, there is a chance with this open crock that you'll get a little bit of surface mold or this, uh, white-ish yeast on top. Now this is a harmless yeast, so you'll just want to skim it off. But mold can be a little bit more daunting. You got to make sure the mold isn't penetrating down into the ferment. There's different opinions on this. If you do have trouble with mold and your ferments, I would just spend some time looking around like Google it and see different pictures of the mold. There's some really good troubleshooting guides there. Mold is something I personally have never had on a ferment. I don't know if it's because I live in such a dry climate or if it's because I have good bacteria, I don't know, bacteria in my house, which sounds weird.

Speaker 1: [11:42](#) I don't know. Um, but I don't have a lot of mold issues so you can troubleshoot it online and there is molds and yeasts that will just happen right on the surface that you can skim off and it's no big deal. Um, there are other molds that you definitely want to toss the ferment cause it's gonna have ruined it. So anyway, with this open crock and a towel, you may have a little bit more occurrence of mold. Not necessarily, but just I want you to be aware of that. It is a possibility. All right, so let's go through to step by step the process of using a crock, and this is not complicated. I just kinda wanted to walk you through what I have been doing. So first off, you want to clean and soak your fermenting weights. So obviously if you're using a saucer or

something heavy from your kitchen, make sure it's nice and clean.

Speaker 1: [12:30](#) My weights are this porous kind of stoneware. So we're just gonna soak them first so they don't get into the crock with the food and soak up all your brine and kind of leave you dry. So that's why we'd pre-soak pretty easy. Next up we have our weights soaking or prepared. We're gonna wash the crock out well, especially if it's been sitting in the root cellar or the basement waiting to be used. Uh, get it nice and clean. Also wash your produce. You know, even if they come from the garden or your garden that's organic, you still want to wash off any dirt and get any contaminants off those vegetables as much as you can. So step three is going to be prepping the vegetables and this is going to really vary depending on what you are fermenting. You can ferment pretty much anything.

Speaker 1: [13:24](#) And there's a lot of different fermentation recipes out there. I'd say the two things I do the most of would be sauerkraut and old fashioned brine pickles and you can get recipes for both of those over on the Prairie homestead blog. And if you really want like all the details, all the nitty gritty of fermentation and a lot of other old fashioned kitchen skills to check out my heritage cooking crash course, I'll leave a note, or I'll leave a link to that in the show notes. It really gets into the deep dark depths of fermentation and how to do it in different formulas and how to make sure your brine is correct and all that good stuff. But for the purpose of today's episode, let's just talk sauerkraut. Let's say we're making some sauerkraut. Um, so if I'm doing that, I have my clean crock, I have my soaked weights, I'm going to shred the cabbage either with a knife or a food processor.

Speaker 1: [14:16](#) I sprinkle on about a tablespoon of salt on the cabbage and then I let it sit for a while because with cabbage it takes a little bit to let the salt do its thing and get the juices flowing. If you're doing something like pickles, this is not a necessary step. This is more of just only exclusive to sauerkraut. So I use my hands to kind of massage the salt into the cabbage and then I start packing it into the crock. And this takes a little bit of time cause you really want to get a tight pack. And also about 10 or 15 minutes into this process, you're going to see the cabbage really start to release its juices. And I have a blog post all about fermentation crocks that accompanies this episode. If you click over to that bar blog post on the Prairie homestead.com you'll see the cabbage literally progress throughout the photos.

Speaker 1: [15:09](#) It'll be kind of dry looking and then it gets a little bit juicy and then it gets like really, really juicy. So just takes a little while for

the cabbage to break down. So we continue this process. We pack and we press and we add a little, a fresh layer of cabbage. I mean continue to pack and press, make it nice and tight and then, um, we're going to make sure it when we're done and all the cabbages in there, that our brine is a good inch or more above the cabbage line. We want to be to be completely covered. And this is where I would use my weights to hold down the cabbage. And when I do this, usually the Brian comes to the top and I can see that I have enough or if I need to add more, I can do that at this point as well.

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Once your crock is full of food, whatever it may be, you're just gonna want to put it somewhere with the lid on so you can keep an eye on it. If you have a very full amount of food in your crock, it's not uncommon for the liquid to kind of bubble out. It's not the end of the world. So you just may want to put like a shallow tray or a cookie sheet underneath it. Um, obviously with my sauerkraut, this last batch, it wasn't very full, so that wasn't an issue. So you want to just make sure it doesn't drip into some dark pantry and leave the sticky salty mess where you're not going to see it for a week. And you also just want to make sure that maybe once or twice throughout this process you might peek at it and skim off any yeast that there's been a build up of that white yeast on the top.

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Just skim that off. I didn't have to do that with mine, but it happens sometimes and then that's it. It's really that easy. It's just just a waiting game at this point. I usually let my kraut set for about 10 days. Some people will let theirs sit for a couple months. It's really just a taste preference. And what you can do is after about that 10 day mark, just taste, you know, dip out a little bit of kraut with, or a pickle. Let's say you're doing pickles with a clean spoon or a fork, taste it and see what you think. If it's not tangy enough or sour enough for you, leave it fermenting longer and it's really, this is the fun part of fermentation cause you get to personally customize it to fit what you and your family like.

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Now here's the part about Crocks that I think that gets a little confusing. For some folks, it's the storage. So in the old days, homesteaders would keep their fermented foods in the Crocks in their root cellar or their cold storage area throughout the winter. And I remember my grandpa talking about his mom making giant vats of sauerkraut and that would be stored throughout the winter and they would just dip sauerkraut off as they ate it throughout the winter months. Most of us though, at least me, I don't have a root cellar or I don't have an unheated room in my home that won't freeze. That's a key. We can't let

this freeze. So because of that, if you don't have a root cellar, you're going to need to make a few adjustments. So if we just leave our fermented vegetables in our Crocks, let's say we put them in our pantry room temperature and we try to leave that for a very long period of time, they're going to keep fermenting and which will result in some very, very tangy food that you may not really love.

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The taste of, you know, has been in there for many, many, many months, um, might be a little bit strong. So at some point we need to halt the fermentation process and we do this by applying cold temperatures. So if you have a root cellar that doesn't freeze, you can stick your crock in there. Or what I do is just take the food out of the crock, put it into jars, and then I store it in my refrigerator. You could store a crock in your refrigerator. The problem is they're kind of large and most of us don't have room for that. You know, unless you have a second fridge or maybe you have a fridge out in your barn or your garage, you have room for a big crock. That works. But for me it works best if I just transfer into Mason jars and then we eat it from there and call it good and that's my friends is the process of using a crock.

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Um, it's not complicated. It's super easy, it's super enjoyable and it just adds that little bit of extra homesteading vibe into your kitchen. So if you are falling in love with the idea of an old fashioned intentional homestead kitchen full of nourishing food and rich memories, I have a fun little bonus for you. I have taken three of the most popular videos from my heritage cooking crash course and I'm going to give them to you for free just for being a part of my tribe. These videos will have you cooking and eating like a farmer in no time at all. Even if you live in the city, you can get instant access to all three of these videos for free over [www.homesteadcookingclass.com](http://www.homesteadcookingclass.com). That's [www.homesteadcookingclass.com](http://www.homesteadcookingclass.com) and that's it. Thanks so much for listening along with me. I hope you enjoyed today's episode. Pop over to Instagram or Facebook. Let me know what you have fermenting in your kitchen, or if you don't have anything going quite yet, tell me what your first fermentation project will be. Take care and I will catch up with you next time on the old fashioned on purpose podcast.