

SITA'S TURSHIYA FROM TURNOVO

If I could make one key addition to Bulgarian Rhapsody, it would be a section on fermented foods. The Bulgarians are pros at preservation through fermentation. Yogurt and sauerkraut are prime examples, but then there is turshiya. There is mounting evidence that fermented foods are one of the keys to health. You will need a big ceramic pot with a good seal to execute this recipe properly.

- 2 lbs sweet peppers - cut up
- 2 lbs young green tomatoes - cut in quarters
- 8 carrots, cut up in 2" chunks
- 1 small red cabbage (for color) cut in eights
- 1 lb young green beans (optional)
- 6 regular cabbage cut into eights
- one cabbage with just the outer leaves used
- 2 quarts plain water
- 1 1/2 cups salt
- 1/2 cup apple cider vinegar
- 1 bay leaf
- peppercorns

Prepare all vegetables and layer in a 5 gallon crock with a spigot in the bottom. Put vegetables in one layer and then a layer of outer cabbage leaves. Then another layer of vegetables, then cabbage leaves, etc.

Take two quarts of water 1/2 quart of apple cider vinegar, 1 1/2 cups salt one bay leaf and a few peppercorns and bring to boil on stove. Pour over vegetables. If necessary, add water to make sure the crock is filled to almost the top. Place a weight on top to push the vegetables down into the liquid. Put in a cool place. (We have what I call the "canning room" which we don't can in, but it's an old stucco closet type tiny building. We have shelves there too. So, you could put it in the garage with a cement floor. This way the crock stays very cool.)

Check after three or four days by taking out some of the juice through the spigot. Check for flavor. If you need to add more salt, put another half cup salt into a pot and drain the liquid from the crock. Bring to boil again and pour over vegetables. I put a special clay "plate" which we had made to fit into the crock before putting the lid on, to weigh the vegies down. Then as the vegies start to get soft, I put a brick on top of the plate to weigh down the veges. They must be in the brine at all times or they'll really get moldy.

Check again after a week. If mold starts, just wipe it off. The vegies will be just fine. Keep checking for three weeks. Then when the liquid starts tasting just great (and it's the best thing in the morning)- a bit salty, but fabulous, start taking the vegies out slowly...each lunch time...cut them up some more, and sprinkle with paprika to serve.

Don't add anymore water after the 2nd time. And, if you drink up the "broth" too quickly because it's pink and beautiful you'll have to eat the vegies quickly so you can start all over again. You only need a few ounces in the morning to get your system going and feeling very Bulgarian.

All of the above should take no more than a month from start to finish. We always had two crocks going so we had lots of "zele" one started then two weeks later, we'd start another. Now, with just me and my daughter's family, we eat only one every couple of months.