Sides

Ginger Beer Plant

A living Caribbean culture of wild yeast and lactobacillus bacteria fed daily on fresh ginger and sugar until it becomes a vigorous, fizzing starter that is then fermented with more water and sugar into a naturally carbonated ginger beer — fiery, tangy, and alive in a way no commercial version can replicate.

Time 20160 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 100 g Fresh ginger root, unpeeled and grated
- ☐ 200 g White cane sugar
- ☐ 2000 g Filtered water (room temperature)
- ☐ 60 g Fresh lemon or lime juice
- ☐ 20 g Extra sugar (for bottling carbonation)
- ☐ 1000 g Extra water (for diluting to drink strength)

Let's make it.

01 In a clean glass jar, combine 1 teaspoon of grated fresh ginger (unpeeled — the skin carries the wild yeasts and bacteria that make ginger beer alive), 1 teaspoon of sugar, and 100 g of filtered water. Stir, cover loosely with a cloth, and leave at room temperature. Every day for 7 days, 'feed' the plant by adding another teaspoon of grated ginger and teaspoon of sugar and stirring. Within 3–4 days you will see bubbles forming at the surface, and the plant will develop a distinct, yeasty-gingery smell. By day 7 it should be vigorously fizzing when stirred. The cumulative daily feeding builds up a dense population of wild micro-organisms from the ginger's skin.

02 Strain the ginger plant liquid through a fine-mesh sieve, pressing the ginger solids to extract all the liquid. Reserve the solids — this is your perpetual 'plant' to keep feeding. In a large glass jar or bucket, dissolve the remaining sugar in the filtered water (stir well, no heat needed). Add the strained plant liquid and the lemon juice. Stir vigorously, cover with a cloth, and leave at room temperature for 2–3 more days, stirring once daily. The now-diluted culture will continue to ferment the sugar water into a lightly alcoholic (0.5–1.5%), tangy, effervescent ginger beer.

03 Add the extra diluting water if you want a lighter, more sessionable drink. Stir in the bottling sugar (this feeds the residual yeast for in-bottle carbonation). Funnel into clean swing-top or plastic bottles, leaving 3 cm of headspace. Seal airtight. Leave at room temperature for 24–48 hours, squeezing plastic bottles daily to gauge pressure — they will go from soft to firm to rock-hard. When drum-tight (plastic bottles) or when a test bottle opens with a definitive hiss (glass), refrigerate all bottles immediately. Serve very cold over ice. Keep refrigerated and consume within 2 weeks.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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