Sides / United States

Lacto-Fermented Hot Sauce

Chiles and garlic submerged in a 2% brine and left to ferment at room temperature for five to seven days — a quiet, bubbling transformation in which lactic acid bacteria consume sugars and build a complex, tangy, deeply flavored sauce that no vinegar-based shortcut can replicate.

Time 10080 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 100 parts Fresh red chiles (Fresno, cayenne, or Thai bird's eye), stems removed
- ☐ 10 parts Garlic cloves, peeled
- ☐ 2 parts Non-iodized salt (kosher or sea salt) — for 2% brine
- ☐ 100 parts Filtered or dechlorinated water — for 2% brine
- ☐ 10 parts Apple cider vinegar (added after fermentation, to taste)

Let's make it.

01 Dissolve the non-iodized salt in filtered water to create a 2% brine by weight — this means 20g of salt per 1 liter of water. Iodized salt must not be used as iodine is antibacterial and will inhibit or kill the lactic acid bacteria essential for fermentation. Tap water must be filtered or left to sit uncovered overnight to off-gas chlorine, which similarly inhibits fermentation. Stir until every grain of salt is fully dissolved — undissolved salt can create areas of inconsistent salinity that allow harmful bacteria to thrive.

02 Pack the destemmed chiles and garlic cloves into a clean glass jar, leaving 4–5cm of headspace. Pour the brine over to cover everything completely — all vegetables must remain submerged below the brine line at all times. Use a weight (a small ziplock bag filled with brine, or a clean stone) to keep everything submerged. Cover the jar with a cloth secured with a rubber band, or use an airlock lid. Do not use a sealed lid — the CO2 produced during fermentation must be able to escape.

03 Ferment at room temperature (ideally 20–22°C) for 5–7 days. Check daily: by day 2–3, small bubbles should be rising through the brine — this is CO2 from active lactic acid bacteria. The brine will cloud noticeably as the bacterial population grows. Press the vegetables down daily to ensure submersion. If any white film (kahm yeast) appears on the surface, skim it off — it is harmless but affects flavor. If anything pink, black, or fuzzy grows, discard and start over. Taste daily from day 4 — the ferment is ready when it is pleasantly sour and complex.

04 Drain the fermented vegetables over a bowl, reserving the brine. Transfer the chiles and garlic to a blender. Blend on high, adding reserved brine a little at a time until the sauce reaches your desired consistency — from chunky to pourable. Add apple cider vinegar to taste: it brightens the flavor and extends shelf life. Strain through a fine mesh sieve for a smooth sauce, or leave unstrained for a chunkier, more rustic result. Bottle and refrigerate — the cold halts fermentation. The sauce improves after another 1–2 weeks in the refrigerator as flavors continue to meld.

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