Sides

Water Kefir

Sparkling, mildly tangy probiotic water — living kefir grains, a symbiotic colony of bacteria and yeasts encased in polysaccharide matrices, convert a simple sugar water into something lightly effervescent and gut-kind over 48 hours. A second ferment in a sealed bottle with fruit traps the CO_2 and builds a proper fizz. Infinitely variable in flavor; demanding in only one thing — keep your grains alive between batches.

Time 2880 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 3 tbsp Water kefir grains (live, active)
- ☐ 1000 g Filtered or unchlorinated water
- ☐ 1 slice Lemon slice (unpeeled, unwaxed)
- ☐ 60 g White cane sugar (or rapadura for minerals)
- ☐ 2 pieces Dried apricots (unsulfured, as a mineral source)
- ☐ 50 g Fresh fruit juice or sliced ginger (for second ferment)

Let's make it.

01 Dissolve the cane sugar in a cup of warm (not hot) water first, stirring until every grain is gone. Let it cool to room temperature, then combine with the remaining cool filtered water in a clean wide-mouth jar. The final temperature must be below 30°C (86°F) — warm enough to be active but not hot enough to damage the grain organisms. The sugar is the sole food source for the grains; do not substitute with honey (which contains antimicrobials that stress the culture), artificial sweeteners (no nutrition for bacteria), or stevia. Rapadura or raw cane sugar are excellent choices as their residual minerals support grain health over time.

02 Gently scoop the water kefir grains into the prepared sugar water using a plastic or wooden spoon — avoid metal utensils, which some producers caution can stress the grains over time (the evidence is mixed, but it is a simple precaution). Add the dried apricots and lemon slice: the apricots provide trace minerals that the grains need for their polysaccharide matrix, and the lemon lowers the pH slightly, suppressing unwanted organisms in the first hours. Cover with a breathable cloth or coffee filter secured with a rubber band — not a solid lid, as the culture produces CO_2 and needs to breathe. Leave at room temperature 22 to 28°C for 24 to 48 hours.

03 Leave the covered jar at 22 to 28°C for 24 to 48 hours. After 24 hours you should see small bubbles clinging to the grains and rising slowly to the surface, and the liquid will have gone slightly more opaque with a faintly sour-yeasty aroma replacing the plain sugar water. Taste at 24 hours: at this point it should be lightly sweet, slightly sour, and faintly fizzy — more like sweet lemonade than kefir. At 48 hours it will be noticeably more sour and tangy with reduced sweetness. The warmer your kitchen, the faster this goes — in a 28°C kitchen, 24 hours may already be past peak. In a 20°C kitchen, 48 hours may not be enough.

04 Strain the finished kefir water through a plastic sieve into clean swing-top bottles, leaving the grains behind. Add fruit juice, sliced ginger, or fresh fruit to each bottle — the residual sugar in the kefir water plus the sugars in the fruit will drive a vigorous second fermentation inside the sealed bottle, dissolving CO_2 into the liquid as carbonation. Seal airtight and leave at room temperature for 12 to 24 hours, pressing or squeezing the bottle every 8 hours to gauge pressure — when it feels drum-tight, refrigerate. Swing-top glass bottles build pressure more predictably than sealed jars. Always open carefully over a sink; the carbonation can be lively.

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