

(below) Chris Taber creates a new batch of homemade Kombucha in his apartment in Bellingham. He removes the mother SCOBY from his brewing jar to harvest the fermented tea.



KOMBUCHA CULTURE

*Home-brewing
fermented tea*

A REFRIGERATOR OPENS AND a soil-covered hand pulls a jar from the top shelf. A pair of lips obscured by facial hair press against the rim.

"I slurp it up," says Western senior Chris Taber as he takes a sip, leaving his moustache laden with bits of sedimentary slime.

Although Kombucha tea is available in supermarkets, Taber prefers to brew Kombucha at home.

"I think it's one of those things that promotes the idea and knowledge about where your food comes from," Taber says. "I think that's really something people have lost."

Home-brewers are not only saving money — Kombucha can cost \$3-\$5 per sixteen ounce bottle — but enjoy learning the process of fermentation.

Home-brewing has become popular because the SCOBY "mother," which ferments the tea, can be cut to share among brewers, Taber says. The SCOBY,

a symbiotic colony of bacteria and yeast, is a living organism that sits on the surface of the tea, feeding off of the sugar.

The SCOBY sitting at the top of the jar of fermenting Kombucha resembles a gelatinous mass of brown, slimy rubber.

"It looks like an alien in a jar," says Jordi Johnson, Western senior and Kombucha brewer.

After one solution is made, the same SCOBY is transferred to a new batch along with some of the previous Kombucha fluid to avoid shocking the chemical balance of the SCOBY.

"It's kind of like transferring fish into a new fish tank," Taber says.

People drink Kombucha to enjoy the taste of the tea and strengthen their immune system. Some cancer patients have turned to Kombucha for its natural antioxidants, says owner of Kombucha Town, Chris McCoy.

Antioxidants form when the probiot-

ics consume the sugar. The probiotics, a species of bacteria that turbocharge digestion by breaking down the food, ferment the tea and ultimately allow nutrients to be absorbed, McCoy says.

"You can feel it go down your system, scraping and gurgling in your stomach," Taber says. "Your gut is like, 'Oh, thank you.'"

Johnson says he likes to watch the SCOBY "creature" grow within the container as it feeds on the sugar.

Sometimes a SCOBY will grow to the point that brewers do not know what to do with the excess, Taber says.

Some brewers decide to fry the gelatinous mass and eat it, whereas others make vegan leather by tanning the SCOBY in the sun and molding it to fit a specific shape.

In the future, Taber plans to continue brewing his Kombucha and even hopes to craft a SCOBY hat. **K**