How to Make Homemade (Fermented) Ginger Ale

I've been experimenting with homemade sodas lately.
You won't believe how EASY they are to make!
They not only taste great, you get to control the flavor, the sugar, the ingredients...everything.
And they go pretty quickly. You can make the whole thing (start to finish) in about 7-10 days.

But why would you want to make your own soda?

Because:

• You know exactly what's in it (no chemicals, preservatives, etc)
• You can control the sugar
• You have the ability to create custom flavorings
• And you get the benefits of lacto-bacteria instead of commercial chemicals

Ginger Ale is also sometimes referred to as "Ginger Beer" (as in Root Beer), but it is not like the "beer" you normally think of.
Although ALL fermented beverages have the possibility of containing alcohol, this particular recipe is a fast ferment.

That means that it should not have anything other than trace amounts - if any alcohol at all.

This post will show you how to make homemade Ginger Ale (about four 16-oz bottles) in four easy steps.

**How the Process Works:**

First you make yourself a Ginger Bug.

What the heck is a Ginger Bug???

A ginger bug is a yeast starter. Just as a sourdough starter is used to make bread; a ginger bug starter is used to make beverages.

How can you NOT love that cute name, right?

A ginger bug is created with wild yeast and bacteria found on the ginger and in the air. So basically it is a wild yeast starter.

And you only need THREE ingredients to create it!

- Organic ginger
- Filtered water (less chlorine)
- Sugar

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That’s it!

For the sugar, I like to use organic sucanat* instead of white granulated sugar. But you can certainly use plain, old white sugar if you want.

The reason I like sucanat is because it is dehydrated brown sugar and is less processed. It still has the molasses and some minerals and that tends to make the ferment go faster and stronger. But if you don’t have any, go ahead and use white granulated sugar instead. It will work.

What you do is mix up the ginger, water and sugar in a jar {recipe below} and let it set at room temp on your kitchen counter for about 3-5 days until it starts to ferment.

Then you use the ginger bug to ferment a batch of flavored sugar-water and THAT makes the ginger ale.

**Step One - Make the Ginger Bug:**

You take a quart-size, glass canning jar and to that you add:

- 2 cups of filtered water
- 1 Tbsp grated organic ginger
- 1 Tbsp sugar (*white granulated or organic sucanat*)

Directions:

1. Combine ingredients in the jar and stir it up.

2. Cover the jar with either cheesecloth or a paper coffee filter (or even a paper towel) and use a rubber band to hold it in place.
3. Set it on the counter.

4. Every 24 hours feed the starter by stirring in the following:
   • 1 Tablespoon grated ginger
   • 1 Tablespoon sugar

Within 3-5 days, you will see signs of fermentation such as:
   • Small bubbles at the top
   • A little foam around the edges
   • You will notice a fizz when you stir
   • A yeast-beer smell
   • Or you can actually see bubbles rising while it is sitting on the counter

If you DON’T see signs of fermenting – give it a few more days. If you STILL don’t or if you ever notice an off smell, throw it out and start again – probably with a new bit of ginger.

Side note: warmer weather gives you a faster ferment. Cooler weather slows the process down.

Once you hit at least 3 days AND you notice the fermentation starting, you can go to Step 2.
Step 2 - Mix Up Flavored Sugar Water

This flavored sugar-water is the base flavor of your Ginger Ale. The classic recipe involves fresh ginger and lemon. I added in a cinnamon stick for fun. But you can omit that if you wish.

Ingredients:
- 2 quarts of water
- 3” piece of ginger, thinly sliced (for a stronger ginger flavor)
- 1 cinnamon stick (optional)
- ¾ cup of sugar
- 1/3 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1/4 cup strained ginger bug liquid

Directions:
1. In a medium-sized saucepan, combine water, ginger, cinnamon and sugar.
2. Bring to a simmer and stir until sugar is dissolved (just a few minutes).
3. Turn off the heat, cover and let it steep about 15 minutes.
4. Strain out the ginger slices and cinnamon stick.
5. Add in 1/3 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice (about 2 large lemons).
6. Let the mixture cool to below 100 degrees or to room temp.
7. Then add ¼ cup strained ginger bug liquid and stir that in.

Note: Be sure to leave some of your ginger bug in your ginger bug jar so you can keep it going for a future batch. I will tell you how to do that in Step 4.
**Step 3 - Bottling**

In order to create the carbonation, you need to now bottle up the ginger ale in a sealed bottle.

What will happen next is that the yeast and bacteria will eat the last bit of sugar and give off carbon dioxide.

This will build up pressure in the bottle and when you open it in a few days, the carbon dioxide bubbles will rise up and you have yourself a carbonated beverage.

**A word of caution:**

It is very important that you watch your brew closely during this stage AND that you use appropriate bottles.

The pressure can build up quickly and you don't want anything exploding - especially glass bottles!

I like to use **flip-top bottles** *(that are meant for homemade beer)*. They come in clear or brown. OR you can reuse old plastic soda bottles with a screw top lid.

The advantage of the flip-tops is that they should pop open if the pressure gets too high *(but just know that they can still sometimes break)*.

The advantage of the plastic bottles is that you can squeeze them to feel when the pressure builds *(they get solid and hard)*. And if they break, they don't send glass everywhere.

Do NOT use canning jars. They tend to break more easily.
The steps:

1. Wash and rinse four 16-oz flip top bottles (or whatever plastic bottles you are using) in hot, soapy water. You can also boil glass bottles for 10 minutes, but plastic bottles will melt if boiled.

2. Pour your soda mixture into the clean bottles and seal them.

3. Let them sit at room temperature and check them every single day for about 3 days to see if they have started to become carbonated. If they are glass, you can just open one to see if it makes the typical Pffft sound and bubbles begin to rise. If it is plastic, you can squeeze the bottle. When the bottle becomes very rigid, you have pressure inside the bottle.

4. As soon as you know you have carbonation and/or pressure build up, refrigerate the bottles.

5. Drink them within a week. The cold temperatures will slow the fermentation process and get them to the best temperature to enjoy the flavors.

Step 4 - Restarting the Ginger Bug

Once you remove some of the ginger bug in step 3, you will need to replenish your “bug” if you want to keep it alive and thriving for the next batch.
After removing the 1/4 cup of strained liquid, you should:

- Add back in 1/4 cup filtered water.
- Add 1 Tbsp. sugar.
- Stir well and keep at room temperature on the counter.
- Continue feeding every 24 hours until your next batch of ginger ale.

If you want to take a break:

If you would like to keep your ginger bug alive, but take a break from the daily feeding, just do this:

1. Place the ginger bug jar it in the refrigerator. (Keep it covered with the coffee filter and rubber band)
2. Then, take it out once a week and let it come to room temperature.
3. Feed it 1 tbsp grated ginger and 1 Tbsp. sugar.
4. Stir and put it back into the refrigerator.
5. As long as you feed it regularly, it should stay alive. But if it ever smells weird, just throw it out and start over.
6. When you are ready to make ginger ale again, take it out and feed it daily for about 3 days or until you see signs of it being in active fermentation again. Then move on to step 2 above.