PATAGONIAN YEAST
FERMENTATIVE INNOVATION
info@patagonianyeast.com
@patagonianyeast
www.patagonianyeast.com

Professional Sensory Categorization Guide for Kombucha

Welcome to this comprehensive guide designed for kombucha producers, judges, and enthusiasts. This fermented beverage has evolved beyond its traditional roots, becoming a healthy, versatile, and innovative alternative in the beverage world. With an ever-growing diversity of flavors, aromatic profiles, and production methods, this guide aims to establish quality and style standards that support the evaluation, development, and appreciation of kombucha.

Beyond being a technical tool, this guide seeks to strengthen the kombucha industry by standardizing sensory language and improving communication between producers, judges, and consumers. Understanding and classifying the different sensory profiles allows for a more accurate reflection of the experience each kombucha offers, enhancing the perceived quality of the product and building greater market trust.

Focused on sensory criteria while also incorporating relevant technical elements, this guide is intended for those who wish to refine their creations and contribute to the professional growth of the kombucha sector. We hope it serves as both a source of inspiration and a practical tool for continuing to explore, innovate, and share the art of kombucha with the world.

With dedication and a passion for fermentation,

Victoria Lobos Marambio – @yeast.mommy

info@patagonianyeast.com
@patagonianyeast
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Professional Sensory Categorization Guide for Kombucha

This guide has been developed to establish clear and professional criteria for the sensory categorization of kombucha. Its goal is to strengthen the kombucha industry by standardizing language, improving product quality, facilitating technical evaluation in competitions, and supporting producers in the design and refinement of their fermented beverages. While the primary focus is sensory, it also incorporates useful technical criteria to enhance communication between judges, producers, and consumers.

General Requirements for All Categories

All entries must meet the following general criteria:

- Declare the type of tea or base infusion used, specifying whether it is green tea, black tea, a blend of teas, or herbal infusions, as appropriate.
- Indicate the perceived level of carbonation in the beverage, using one of the following categories:
  - **Still / Non-carbonated:** No carbonation. No perceptible bubbles visually or sensorially.
  - **Low Petillant:** Very light presence of bubbles. Barely noticeable on the palate, with no visible foam formation.
  - **Classic Petillant:** Subtle carbonation with fine, delicate bubbles. Light effervescence in the mouth, non-invasive. Similar to some natural wines or artisanal kombuchas.
  - **High Petillant:** Clearly present bubbles with a more pronounced effervescence, yet not "sparkling." May produce a thin layer of bubbles when served.
  - **Sparkling:** High carbonation. Active and persistent bubbles. Visible foam or head formation when poured. Similar to beer, cider, or champagne.
- Declare the perceived level of residual sweetness, choosing from the following options:
  - Dry
  - Semi-dry
  - Balanced (sweetness/acidity)
  - Semi-sweet
  - Sweet

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- Indicate the perceived level of acidity, using the following scale:
  - Low
  - Medium-low
  - Medium
  - Medium-high
  - High
- Clearly specify any additions made during production, such as fruits, spices, flowers, vegetables, grains, among others.
- Avoid the presence of excessive sediment or suspended particles. The visual presentation of the beverage should be appealing.
- All kombucha must be made exclusively from Camellia sinensis leaves, from the sinensis and/or assamica varieties.
- By definition, it is considered a non-alcoholic beverage, with an alcohol content equal to or below 0.5% ABV, unless otherwise stated in specific categories.
- **From a sensory perspective, all kombucha must display a characteristic acetic fermentation profile**, noticeable in both aroma and flavor. The intensity and expression of this feature will depend on the style and recipe of the producer, but its presence is essential for the beverage to be identified as kombucha.

The absence of this key fermentative note may shift the product closer to a juice profile and will be considered out of category, as the final product must be representative of the kombucha industry.

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Sensory Categorization Guide for Kombuchas

1. Traditional Non-Alcoholic Kombucha (≤0.5% ABV)
Made exclusively with Camellia sinensis (and/or assamica) tea as the base. It must present a characteristic tea flavor, low to medium acidity, and low to medium residual sweetness. Alcohol should not be perceptible. It may or may not be carbonated.

Subcategories:
1.A: Black tea
1.B: Green tea
1.C: Tea blends
1.D: Other teas (white, yellow, oolong, pu-erh, etc.)

2. Non-Alcoholic Mixed Herbal Infusion or Spiced Kombucha (≤0.5% ABV)
Made from a blend of Camellia sinensis with other herbs or exclusively from herbal infusions (hibiscus, rooibos, mint, mate, among others). It must present a balanced sensory profile, with low to medium intensity of organic acid aroma and/or flavor, noticeable herbal or infused taste, low to medium acidity, low to medium residual sweetness, and a declared carbonation level (still, petillant, or sparkling).

3. Non-Alcoholic Fruit-Flavored or Fruit-Infused Kombucha (≤0.5% ABV)
Made 100% with Camellia sinensis as the base, incorporating fruits, juices, and/or pulps. The color may vary depending on the added ingredients. Both fruit aroma and flavor must be clearly perceptible, pleasant, and well integrated into the overall beverage profile, maintaining balance with the characteristic kombucha acidity.
Expected attributes include low to medium-high acidity, low to medium-high residual sweetness, and any carbonation level (still, petillant, or sparkling, as declared).
Clear disclosure of the fruit additions is mandatory.

4. Non-Alcoholic Cereal-Based Kombucha (≤0.5% ABV)
Made with a Camellia sinensis base combined with cereals such as corn, barley, wheat, rye, among others, which may be used in various forms (mashed, cooked, or fermented). These additions should add complexity and character to the sensory profile.
The beverage color will depend on the type of cereal and tea used, as well as any thermal or fermentative treatment applied. On the nose and palate, cereal-derived notes should be evident, contributing roasted, malty, earthy, or grainy nuances as appropriate, without overshadowing the characteristic kombucha acidity.

Expected acidity ranges from mild to moderate, balancing the grain flavors. Residual sweetness should remain very low to medium, avoiding cloying or dominant flavors. Carbonation may vary between still (no carbonation), petillant (light), or sparkling (high), as declared by the producer.
All added ingredients must be clearly listed, including any treatments applied to the cereals (e.g., mashing, cooking, fermentation, etc.).

5. Non-Alcoholic Cereal and Fruit Kombucha (≤0.5% ABV)

Made from a Camellia sinensis base, combined with cereals (such as corn, barley, wheat, rye, among others) and fruits or fruit pulps, used in various forms depending on the producer's process. The color may vary based on the ingredients and methods used.

Both the cereal and fruit character should be clearly perceptible in aroma and flavor, with medium to high intensity and harmonious integration between the two sensory dimensions. The profile should express balance among sweet, acidic, and earthy notes, avoiding dominance by any one component.

Expected acidity ranges from low to medium, complementing the fruity and grain flavors. Residual sweetness should be low to medium, keeping the beverage within typical style parameters. It may be carbonated or not (still, petillant, or sparkling, as declared by the producer).

Clear disclosure of all ingredients used is mandatory, including any treatment applied to the cereals and fruits (e.g., mashing, cooking, fermentation, etc.).

6. JUM Kombucha (Honey-Based)

Unlike traditional kombucha, which uses sugar as the primary carbohydrate source for fermentation, JUM Kombucha is made exclusively with honey throughout the process, without added sugars at any stage. This approach not only modifies the fermentation profile but can also bring distinctive sensory characteristics and potential benefits associated with the bioactive compounds in honey.

The beverage is produced from infusions or blends of Camellia sinensis, fermented solely with honey as the substrate. The use of fruit must be clearly declared and, if included, should serve only to add flavor—without encouraging secondary fermentation.

Honey should be clearly perceptible in both aroma and flavor, with an intensity that may range from low to high depending on the recipe. The color will vary based on the type of tea and any additional permitted ingredients, such as spices. Expected acidity is low to medium, and residual sweetness should also be low to medium. Carbonation may be still, petillant, or sparkling, as declared.

Subcategories:

6.A: Traditional JUM Kombucha – Black Tea
6.B: Traditional JUM Kombucha – Green Tea
6.C: Traditional JUM Kombucha – Tea Blend
6.D: JUM Kombucha with Spices and/or Other Ingredients (no fruit)
6.E: JUM Kombucha with Fruit Added Post-Fermentation – Flavoring only, no refermentation
6.F: JUM Kombucha with Alcohol, Fruits, Spices, and/or Other Ingredients

7. Non-Alcoholic Kombucha with Additions of Fruits, Spices, Vegetables, and/or Flowers (≤0.5% ABV)

Made with Camellia sinensis, fermented from pure infusions or blends, and incorporating fruits, spices, vegetables, and/or flowers. The color may vary depending on the additions used, which must be clearly perceptible in the sensory profile.

The aroma and flavor of the fruits, spices, or vegetables should be expressed with medium to high intensity, always maintaining balance with the characteristic acidity of kombucha.

Negative descriptors or defects such as alcoholic, sulfurous, sulfidic, or butyric notes will not be accepted. Acidity should range from low to medium, and residual sweetness from low to medium. The beverage may be still, petillant, or sparkling, as declared by the producer.

Subcategories:

7.A: Non-Alcoholic Kombucha (≤0.5% ABV) with Hops

Kombucha made with Camellia sinensis and the addition of hops in any form (whole cone, pellet, extract, etc.). The hop character must be perceptible in the aromatic and flavor profile, potentially showing citrus, herbal, floral, or resinous notes depending on the variety used. There should be balance between the hops, the acidity, and the other components of the beverage.

8. Non-Alcoholic Coffee Kombucha (≤0.5% ABV)

Made with a Camellia sinensis base and fermented from tea infusions, incorporating coffee in any of its forms (infusion, ground beans, cold brew, extract, etc.). This category aims to explore the synergy between the fermentative character of kombucha and the flavor nuances of coffee.

The sensory profile must allow for a clear perception of the coffee, with characteristic notes such as roast, cocoa, nuts, or mild bitterness, depending on the type and treatment of the coffee used. These elements must be harmoniously integrated with the acidity and freshness of kombucha, without the coffee overwhelming the profile.

Color will vary depending on the coffee type and preparation method. Acidity should range from low to medium, and residual sweetness from low to medium. Carbonation can be still, petillant, or sparkling, as declared.

Subcategories:

8.A: Coffee Kombucha

Kombucha that includes coffee as the sole additional ingredient, without other fruits, spices, vegetables, or flowers. The profile should demonstrate clear integration between the coffee and the fermentative base, maintaining sensory balance with no defects.

8.B: Coffee Kombucha with Complementary Additions (fruits, spices, vegetables, or flowers)

Kombucha that includes coffee along with other complementary ingredients. These additions must be well-integrated, enrich the sensory profile, and not mask the character of either the coffee or the kombucha. Harmony and complexity are expected, without aromatic or flavor saturation.

9. Traditional Alcoholic Kombucha (≤6% ABV)

Alcoholic kombucha made exclusively with Camellia sinensis, without the addition of other infusions, fruits, spices, flowers, or supplementary ingredients. This category seeks to highlight the purity of alcoholic tea-based fermentation while preserving kombucha's identity.

The perception of alcohol should be present with low to medium intensity, both in aroma and flavor, but always balanced with the body and the fermentative character of the beverage. The sensory profile should remain clean, with low to medium acidity and low to medium residual sweetness. Carbonation may be still, petillant, or sparkling, as declared by the producer.

Some natural fermentation by-products such as esters and alcohols that contribute complexity are acceptable. However, the presence of faults such as sulfuric notes, butyric compounds, or excessive yeast in suspension will be penalized.

10. Alcoholic Kombucha with Additions of Fruits, Spices, Vegetables, and/or Flowers (≤6% ABV)

Alcoholic kombucha made with a base of Camellia sinensis and/or blends with other infusions, optionally incorporating fruits, spices, vegetables, and/or flowers. This category allows for versions with greater sensory complexity, where the additions must be harmoniously integrated into the fermentative profile of the kombucha.

Color and aroma will vary depending on the ingredients used but must accurately reflect what is declared by the producer. On the palate, a balanced experience is expected between the flavors provided by the additions, the natural acidity of the ferment, and the perception of alcohol.

Acidity should range from low to medium, and residual sweetness from low to medium. Alcohol should be perceived at low to medium intensity, without dominating the profile or aftertaste. Carbonation may be still, petillant, or sparkling, as declared.

Fermentative by-products like esters and alcohols are acceptable if they contribute positively to the complexity. Sulfurous, butyric aromas or flavors, or excessive yeast presence, are considered defects.

Subcategories:

10.A: Alcoholic Kombucha (≤6% ABV) with Fruits

Made with the addition of fresh or dried fruits, juices, or pulps. The fruit character must be clearly identifiable without overshadowing the fermentative profile.

10.B: Alcoholic Kombucha (≤6% ABV) with Spices and/or Vegetables

Includes the addition of spices (e.g., cinnamon, ginger, cardamom) and/or vegetables (e.g., carrot, beetroot, cucumber). These elements must balance with the fermentative base, adding complexity without overwhelming the beverage.

10.C: Alcoholic Kombucha (≤6% ABV) with Flowers

Made with fresh or dried flowers (e.g., hibiscus, jasmine, lavender, rose). The floral presence should contribute elegance and complexity without excessive perfumed or soapy notes.

10.D: Alcoholic Kombucha (≤6% ABV) with Mixed Additions

Includes combinations of fruits, spices, vegetables, and/or flowers. A balanced sensory integration among all elements is expected, with no single component overpowering the others or the alcoholic kombucha base.

11. Traditional Hard Kombucha (≥6.2% ABV)

High-alcohol hard kombucha made exclusively from a Camellia sinensis base and/or infusions, without the addition of fruits, spices, vegetables, or flowers. This style represents a strong kombucha with an alcohol content equal to or greater than 6.2% ABV, maintaining its fermentative identity with greater structural complexity.

The sensory profile should be well-balanced, with alcohol perceived at low to medium-high intensity, both on the nose and the palate. The alcohol must integrate harmoniously with the body of the beverage, without overpowering the flavor or aftertaste.

Acidity is expected to range from low to medium-high, and residual sweetness from low to medium. Carbonation may be still, petillant, or sparkling, as declared.

Fermentation by-products such as esters and certain higher alcohols are acceptable if they contribute positively to the complexity of the profile. Faults such as sulfurous aromas, butyric compounds, excessive fusel alcohols, or noticeable yeast in suspension will not be accepted.

12. Hard Kombucha with Additions of Fruits, Spices, Vegetables, and/or Flowers (≥6.2% ABV)

High-alcohol hard kombucha made with a base of Camellia sinensis and/or blended infusions, incorporating fruits, spices, vegetables, and/or flowers. This category explores more complex versions, where the integration of alcohol, kombucha's natural acidity, and the added ingredients (fruits, spices, botanicals, etc.) creates a sophisticated and balanced sensory profile.

Color and aroma will vary depending on the ingredients used, which must be clearly and accurately declared by the producer. Additions must be perceptible on both the nose and palate, without masking the fermentative character or disrupting the overall balance.

Acidity should range from low to medium, and residual sweetness should remain between low and medium. Alcohol, at levels equal to or above 6.2% ABV, should be perceived with low to medium intensity, integrated smoothly into the body of the beverage without dominating the flavor or aftertaste.

Fermentation by-products such as esters and alcohols are acceptable as long as they enhance complexity. Faults such as sulfurous compounds, butyric notes, excessive fusel alcohols, or unwanted yeast residues will be penalized.

Subcategories:

12.A: Hard Kombucha (≥6.2% ABV) with Fruit

Includes the addition of fresh or dried fruits, juices, or pulps. The fruit character must be clearly perceptible and well integrated with both the fermentative and alcoholic profile.

12.B: Hard Kombucha (≥6.2% ABV) with Spices and/or Vegetables

Includes additions such as cinnamon, clove, ginger, cardamom, or vegetables like beetroot, cucumber, or carrot. These elements should add complexity without becoming dominant or dissonant.

12.C: Hard Kombucha (≥6.2% ABV) with Flowers

Made with dried or fresh flowers (hibiscus, jasmine, lavender, rose, etc.). The floral expression should be delicate and elegant, without artificial or soapy aromas.

12.D: Hard Kombucha (≥6.2% ABV) with a Blend of Fruits, Spices, Vegetables, and/or Flowers

Includes hard kombuchas that combine two or more types of additions such as fruits, spices, vegetables, and flowers. This category encompasses beverages of high sensory complexity, where all ingredients must be harmoniously integrated, allowing for a clear expression of each component without causing sensory overload or unbalanced dominance.

The profile should display a balanced interaction between botanical notes, fermentative character, and alcohol content, maintaining cleanliness and coherence in aroma and flavor. A technically and sensorially well-executed beverage is expected, with a distinct identity and a well-structured body.

13. Specialty Kombucha

This category is intended for kombuchas that, due to their formulation, processes, or incorporated ingredients, do not fit into any of the previous categories. Specialty kombuchas include those that integrate non-traditional elements or use techniques that significantly alter the sensory or technical profile of the beverage, distancing it from the classic kombucha character.

May include:

- Use of alternative sweeteners (e.g., specialty honeys, maple syrup, coconut sugar, etc.)
- Extended aging or maturation in wood
- Spontaneous or unconventional fermentations
- Co-fermentation, blending, or assembly with other fermented beverages (beers, ciders, wines, meads, etc.)
- Innovative ingredient combinations that significantly alter the typical kombucha profile

The producer must clearly justify why the sample qualifies as a specialty kombucha, indicating the ingredients, applied methods, and how these affect the traditional character of the beverage.

Subcategories:

13.A: Non-Alcoholic Specialty Kombucha (≤0.5% ABV)

Includes non-alcoholic kombuchas made with Camellia sinensis and/or other infusions that incorporate ingredients or techniques not covered in other categories. These may involve fruits, spices, woods, extended fermentations, alternative sweeteners, or other distinguishing elements.

The sensory profile may include fruity, spicy, phenolic, or lightly oxidative notes, always maintaining balance. Acidity should range from low to medium, and residual sweetness from low to medium. Carbonation may or may not be present.

Defects such as sulfur compounds, butyric notes, perceptible alcohol, or excessive yeast presence are not acceptable.

13.B: Specialty Kombuchas with Alcohol (>0.5% ABV)

Includes alcoholic kombuchas made with Camellia sinensis and/or other infusions, incorporating creative additions such as fruits, spices, wood, aging processes, mixed fermentations, or blends with other fermented beverages.

The profile must retain recognizable kombucha traits, complemented by the additions. Acidity should range from low to medium, and sweetness from low to medium. Alcohol should be perceived at low to medium-high intensity, without dominating the profile. Fermentative esters and alcohols are acceptable as part of the complexity.

Defects such as sulfur compounds, excessive fusel alcohols, or suspended yeast are not permitted.

13.C: Kombuchas with Mixed or Hybrid Techniques

This includes kombuchas produced by integrating other fermentation matrices such as beer, cider, wine, mead, or others. These beverages must achieve a harmonious sensory integration, where the characteristic traits of kombucha coexist with the attributes of the beverage with which it has been blended or co-fermented.

There must be a clear balance between body, acidity, sweetness, and alcohol content, with clean technical execution and no faults.

Registration Requirements (Mandatory)

- Participants MUST specify all ingredients used.
- They MUST indicate the level of carbonation (still, petillant, sparkling).
- They MUST describe the level of sweetness (dry, semi-dry, balanced, semi-sweet, sweet).
- They MUST include a technical description of the final product, detailing the production method and the reasons why the kombucha should be considered a specialty.

14. Functional Kombuchas

This category is intended for kombuchas that, in addition to the natural fermentative benefits of the beverage (organic acids, probiotics, balanced acidity), are intentionally designed to provide additional health benefits through the use of functional ingredients or specific processes.

To be considered functional, a kombucha must meet the following conditions:

- Contain live microorganisms in viable quantities at the time of consumption, avoiding processes that reduce or eliminate their presence (such as pasteurization or aggressive filtration).
- Include functional ingredients with scientific evidence of their beneficial properties, such as adaptogens, natural antioxidants, vitamins, minerals, prebiotics, dietary fibers, among others.
- Not include artificial additives (synthetic colorants, flavorings, preservatives) that compromise the integrity or functionality of the product.
- Maintain a low to moderate level of residual sugar, as excessive sweetness may contradict the health-oriented objective and negatively affect microbial viability.
- Clearly declare the intended functional benefit, such as improving digestion, strengthening the immune system, reducing stress, balancing gut microbiota, or supporting metabolic health, among others.

Functional claims will be positively evaluated if they are supported by technical literature, evidence of traditional use, or internal trials, and if the overall formulation maintains the typical sensory balance of kombucha.

Technical warning: Kombuchas that are filtered, excessively sweetened, or contain non-viable microorganisms at the time of consumption will not qualify for this category, even if they include healthy ingredients.