



“There’s always lineups at the market; I never take it for granted. That’s where we meet people and introduce new customers to the product, some who come from other provinces for it,” explains Baraz. And whether it’s at St. Albert’s outdoor market, Bountiful or Old Strathcona Farmers’ Markets in Edmonton, or Crossroads Market and Calgary Farmers’ Markets down the highway, Baraz, her daughter and other helping hands know that’s the work: showcasing Garage Kombucha to a curious and eager customer base; those interested in fermented products that boast health benefits by way of probiotics and antioxidants.

“All kombucha isn’t created equal. We use a natural, slow fermentation process (30 days; no forced carbonation here) that gives a slight sweetness and bubbly finish; a soft taste profile,” Baraz says, marveling that the company quickly moved from a garage experiment to being a brewery with a rented Edmonton warehouse space that has produced thousands of litres of flavoured kombucha in just a few short years.

Core flavours of the small batch kombucha brews include mango, haskap, guava, peach, raspberry and lemon ginger, though the naked green (featuring organic green tea) is popular too, especially cherished for mixing in cocktails. Rotating limited editions include saskatoon berry, elderflower hibiscus and root beer. “That’s popular with kids,” she says, adding that a lot of customers with young families are looking for low calorie, low sugar beverages like kombucha for its potential health benefits and as an alternative to pop or juice.

Benefits linked to the low-calorie drink revolve around its use of SCOBY (aka: symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast) fermenting the tea and sugar to create a bubbly, tangy beverage. Garage Kombucha’s raw, always ‘live’ beverage isn’t pasteurized, boasting probiotics and antioxidants which promote a healthy immune system, Baraz says, and can aid digestion and relieve stomach and intestinal issues.

Proponents of the ancient beverage also point to kombucha’s amino acids, B and C vitamins and polyphenols. Its popularity also meets with those seeking a natural beverage that is low in caffeine and sugar – most often made with black tea, cane sugar, select fruits, flowers, spices and herbs, plus the key ingredient: SCOBY.

Since moving to Edmonton from BC, faithful customer Anna Hill says Garage Kombucha has become a mainstay. “When I want to treat myself (and my family), I also buy their Kimchi and pickles. Both are to die for,” she says, adding that in a couple of years, she and her family are enjoying better gut health. “Garage has less sugar, no additives, and all of the active beneficial microbes you would want in a fermented product. I also appreciate that all of their packaging is recyclable, so there’s low environmental impact.”

Farmers’ market customers like Hill and Pilipchuck both mention that buying ‘local’ matters; supporting small business and the local economy, yes, but also building a relationship between vendor and customer. That echoes Baraz’ sentiments, and it’s why she finds herself at markets most weekends, sharing information on the product, on where the returnable,



recyclable bottles are sourced and the overall benefits of adding fermented products to the diet.

Baraz says Garage Kombucha is proud of utilizing reusable, pressure-rated one-litre glass containers and 355 mL recyclable cans to hold its beverage. Customers pay a bottle deposit that they can bring back to Garage Kombucha at markets and at some partner retailers (including Bon Ton Bakery and Community Natural Foods in Edmonton.) Other retail partners include Italian Centre Shops in Calgary and Edmonton and MacEwan University in Edmonton. The ever-busy Baraz is also in talks to have a few flavours of Garage Kombucha in the local section (refrigerated area) of Sobeys/Safeway stores in Alberta.

“We’ve also got plans for a ‘hard’ kombucha (5 per cent alcohol), so that’s in the works with AGLC, and we want to introduce wellness shots,” Baraz says of future plans for the company. (For those that wonder, the pair still operates the Latin dance studio too – passions don’t fall away, no matter how busy one gets). Wellness shots are a newer product on the horizon, often containing ingredients like ginger, turmeric, and lemon. Kombucha falls in line with what these shots are said to offer; a boost to the system to aid in digestion, increase energy levels and immunity with a concentrated dose of vitamins and antioxidants.

“We’ve always got so much on the go. But as my husband says, ‘all good things start in the garage.’

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*Lucy Haines is a long-time freelance writer, specializing in travel, food, arts and entertainment. When she isn't writing, Lucy is a busy mom to four fantastic kids, and enjoys singing and performing in the local community theatre scene.*