

INTERNATIONAL FERMENTED BEVERAGE CUP

KOMBUCHA GUIDE 2025



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Developed as a categorization tool for the 2025 International Fermented Foods Cup

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INTRODUCTION TO CATEGORY K

This guide was created to serve as a link between production and the consumer, providing objective and consistent parameters that contribute to both product development and the consumer experience. In this way, we seek to strengthen trust and understanding between those who produce and those who enjoy these beverages, promoting a culture of quality, innovation, and sensory consistency.

Our goal is to promote the development and acculturation of the industry, fostering a common language that enriches producers, consumers, and the entire fermented community.

RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER FERMENTED GUIDES

This Category K was developed to provide a professional evaluation framework for kombucha in competitions and certifications. Kombucha, as a fermented tea beverage produced using a symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast (SCOBY), has evolved beyond its traditional roots, becoming a healthy, versatile, and innovative alternative within the world of fermented beverages.

KOMBUCHAS

Category K Kombucha represents a comprehensive effort to categorize and describe emerging styles of kombucha that address modern trends toward conscious drinking, alcohol-free and controlled-alcohol options, and functional beverages.

The objectives of this category are:

- Better recognize and categorize kombucha products that maintain the authentic character of a fermented beverage
- Addressing the growing demand for functional alternatives that offer additional health benefits
- Describe innovative products that combine fermentation tradition with modern ingredients
- Provide an evaluation framework for products ranging from completely alcohol-free to full-strength options
- Helping competition organizers appropriately categorize this diverse range of products

Styles and Subcategories

Category K uses a subcategory system divided into main groups:

- **K1-K8** : Alcohol-free kombuchas ($\leq 0.5\%$ ABV) with various characteristics
- **K9-K10** : Medium-alcohol kombuchas ($\leq 6\%$ ABV)
- **K11-K12** : Kombuchas High-alcohol hard ($> 6\%$ ABV)
- **K13** : Experimental Kombuchas
- **K14** : Functional Kombuchas

Use of Category K

This category was designed primarily for fermented beverage competitions, but also serves as a reference for innovative producers, distributors, and consumers interested in kombucha. Individual descriptions are written to assist with structured judging during competitions.

Category K is a guideline, not a specification. It is intended to describe the general characteristics of the most common examples and to aid in their evaluation; it is not intended to be rigorously applied specifications. They are suggestions, not strict limits.

Basic Categorization

The categorization of K styles is based on:

- Alcohol content (alcohol-free vs. medium vs. high)
- Type of tea or base infusion (*Camellia sinensis* pure, blends, herbal infusions)
- Presence of added ingredients (fruits, spices, cereals, coffee, etc.)
- Intended functionality (probiotics, functional ingredients, etc.)

Common Attributes of All K Styles

It is assumed that the attributes described in this section should be present in every K-style description, unless otherwise stated.

Essential requirements:

- ***Camellia* leaves *sinensis* (varieties *sinensis* and/or *assamica*) or blends that include this tea**
- It must present a characteristic profile of acetic fermentation, perceptible in aroma and flavor
- The absence of this acetic fermentation note will distance the product from the style, bringing it closer to a juice profile.
- Must be free of significant technical defects
- It must show a harmonious integration between the fermented base and any added ingredients
- Special ingredients should not create unpleasant medicinal or artificial flavors

Sensory parameters:

- All products must exhibit an appropriate balance between acidity, residual sweetness, tea character and carbonation according to their specific subcategory
- The visual presentation should be attractive, avoiding excessive sediment or unwanted suspended particles.

Subcategory Description Format

We use a standard format to describe K subcategories:

- **Overall Impression:** The essence of the subcategory and its distinctive features
- **Aroma and Flavor:** The primary sensory characteristics that define the subcategory
- **Appearance:** Expected color, clarity, and carbonation
- **Mouthfeel:** Body, texture, and other tactile aspects
- **Ingredients:** Typical components and production methods
- **Comments:** Technical, cultural information, or additional notes
- **Entry Instructions:** Specific Requirements for Competencies
- **Varieties:** Types of tea, fruits or other appropriate ingredients
- **Vital Statistics:** Acidity, Sweetness, Carbonation, ABV
- **Commercial Examples:** Selection of representative products

IMPORTANT REMINDER: These descriptions are guidelines intended to aid in assessment and categorization. Vital statistics ranges and sensory descriptions should be interpreted as general references, not as absolute limits. Innovation and creativity within the spirit of each subcategory are welcome.

GENERAL ENTRY INSTRUCTIONS FOR CATEGORY K

MUST specify for all subcategories:

- Type of tea or base infusion used (black, green, white, oolong , puerh , blends, herbal infusions)
- Carbonation level: Still , Low Petillant , Classic Petillant , High Petillant , or Sparkling /Sparkling
- Residual sweetness level: Dry, Semi-dry, Balanced, Semi-sweet, or Sweet
- Perceived acidity level: Low, Medium-low, Medium, Medium-high, or High
- All added ingredients (fruits, spices, cereals, flowers, vegetables, etc.)
- Special production method if applicable
- All potential allergens present

You MAY optionally specify:

- Approximate concentrations of special ingredients
- Specific production techniques
- Origin of ingredients (organic, local, etc.)
- Fermentation time
- Type of sugar or sweetener used

REGULATORY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Health claims must comply with local regulations
- Some ingredients may be restricted in certain jurisdictions
- Nutritional labeling may be required
- Alcohol limits may affect product classification

K. KOMBUCHAS

Kombuchas represent a growing category of tea-based fermented beverages cultivated using symbiotic cultures of bacteria and yeast (SCOBY). This category reflects modern trends toward conscious drinking, the inclusion of functional ingredients, and diverse alcohol profiles. The development of this category responds to the growing demand for alternatives that maintain the complexity and character of traditional kombuchas while exploring new frontiers of flavor, functionality, and sensory experience.

K1. Traditional Non-Alcoholic Kombucha (≤0.5% ABV)

Overall Impression: A refreshing fermented beverage made exclusively with *Camellia tea sinensis*, which presents the authentic character of the selected tea, with balanced acidity characteristic of acetic fermentation and a controlled residual sweetness, without perceptible alcohol content.

Aroma and Flavor: Aroma characteristic of the type of tea used (vegetal notes in green tea, malty notes in black tea, floral notes in white tea, etc.), with a clear but not dominant presence of acetic notes from fermentation. On the palate, the tea's flavor should be recognizable and balanced with acidity, which should be refreshing without being overpowering. The residual sweetness should complement the profile without dominating. The finish should be clean, with a persistent character of the tea and acetic freshness.

Appearance: Appropriate color for the type of tea used: pale gold to amber for black tea, greenish yellow for green tea, very pale for white tea. It should be clear to bright, without excessive cloudiness. Foam may vary depending on carbonation, from absent (still) to persistent (frothy).

Mouthfeel: Light to medium-light body, with a clean, refreshing texture. Carbonation varies depending on the producer's statement (still, smoky, sparkling). Acidity should provide structure without excessive astringency. There should be no perceptible alcoholic heat.

Ingredients: *Camellia* leaves *sinensis* (*sinensis* and/or *assamica* varieties), water, sugar or sweetener for fermentation, SCOBY culture (symbiotic culture of acetic acid bacteria and yeast). No added fruits, spices, or other ingredients.

Comments: This category represents kombucha in its purest form, where the quality of the tea and the fermentation process are key. The selection of tea and the fermentation time define the final profile. The balance between acidity and residual sweetness is critical.

Entry Instructions: Participants MUST specify the exact type of tea used (black, green, white, oolong, puerh, or specific blend). They MUST state the carbonation level, sweetness, and acidity. They MUST state the approximate fermentation time if relevant.

SUBCATEGORIES:

- **K1A: Traditional Black Tea Kombucha :** Made exclusively with black tea (*Camellia sinensis* var . *assamica* or oxidized *sinensis*). It has malty, earthy notes, sometimes with hints of caramel or nuts. Its color is golden to amber. The robust character of the black tea should be noticeable and balanced by the fermentation acidity.
- **K1B: Traditional Green Tea Kombucha :** Made exclusively with green tea (*Camellia sinensis* (unoxidized or minimally oxidized). It has vegetal, herbal, and fresh notes, sometimes with marine or nutty nuances. Pale greenish-yellow in color. The delicate character of the green tea should be recognizable without excessive bitterness.
- **K1C: Traditional Tea Blend Kombucha :** Made with combinations of different types of *Camellia tea sinensis* (black, green, white, oolong, etc.). The profile should show complexity derived from the blend, with perceptible and balanced characteristics of both teas. Color varies depending on the blend.
- **K1D: Traditional Kombucha from Other Teas :** Made with specialty teas such as white tea (delicate, floral, subtle), yellow tea (smooth, slightly sweet), oolong (semi-oxidized , complex, floral-fruity), or puerh (earthy, aged, deep). Each type must express its distinctive characteristics balanced by acetic fermentation.

Vital Statistics:

ABV: 0.0 - 0.5%

Acidity: Low to Medium High

Residual Sweetness: Low to Medium

Carbonation: Variable (Still to Sparkling , as stated)

K2. Non-Alcoholic Mixed Infusion or Spice Kombucha (≤0.5% ABV)

Overall Impression: A kombucha made from *Camellia blends sinensis* with other herbs, or exclusively with herbal infusions, which presents a balanced sensory profile where the herbal or infused character complements the acetic fermentation profile.

Aroma and Flavor: Complex aroma that combines the notes of the tea (if present) with herbal or added spice characteristics. The herbal character should be perceptible and well-defined, without being medicinal. Acetic acidity should be present, providing freshness and structure. The spice profile should be harmoniously integrated, without dominating or creating artificial notes. The finish should be clean, with a balanced lingering herbal and fermentative note.

Appearance: Color varies depending on the infusions used, from pale gold to reddish (hibiscus) or greenish (mint) hues. It should be clear to slightly cloudy, depending on the herbs used. The foam and/or bubbles should be appropriate for the stated carbonation level.

Mouthfeel: Light to medium body, with a refreshing texture. Some herbs may contribute light tannins or subtle astringency. Carbonation varies depending on the wine. Acidity should be balanced, not overpowering.

Ingredients: *Camellia sinensis* blended with herbs, or unique herbal infusions (hibiscus, rooibos, mint, yerba mate, tulsi, chamomile, etc.), SCOBY culture, and sugar for fermentation. Spices (cinnamon, ginger, cardamom, etc.) may be included.

Comments: This category allows you to explore more complex profiles while maintaining kombucha's fermentation character. Herb selection and ratio are critical for balance. Some infusions may require adjustments to fermentation times.

Entry Instructions: Participants MUST specify all infusions and/or spices used with approximate proportions. They MUST declare whether or not *Camellia was used. sinensis as a base. Carbonation, sweetness, and acidity levels MUST be indicated.*

Varieties: Any herbal infusion suitable for fermentation: hibiscus, rooibos, mint, mate, tulsi, chamomile, lavender, ginger, turmeric, among others.

Vital Statistics:

ABV: 0.0 - 0.5%

Acidity: Low to Medium

Residual Sweetness: Low to Medium

Carbonation: Variable (Still to Sparkling, as stated)

K3. Alcohol-Free Fruit Kombucha (≤0.5% ABV)

Overall Impression: A kombucha made with 100% *Camellia sinensis* as a base, with the addition of fruits that provide aromatic and gustatory complexity, maintaining the acetic fermentation character as a foundation and without significant alcohol content (0.0 - 0.5%).

Aroma and Flavor: Aroma where the fruity character is clearly perceptible and appealing, complementing the notes of the base tea and the fermentation acidity. The fruit should express itself naturally, without artificial flavors. On the palate, the fruity flavor should be balanced with the characteristic acetic acidity, creating a refreshing and complex profile. The fruit should not completely dominate the fermentation profile. The finish should be clean with a fruity persistence and balanced acetic acidity.

Appearance: Color varies depending on the fruit added: pink to reddish tones (red berries), yellow to orange (citrus, mango), purple (blackberry, blueberry). It should be clear to bright, without excessive fruit sediment unless justified by the producer (look for a smoothie effect, for example). The foam should be appropriate for the carbonation level; it may show slight fruit color tones.

Mouthfeel: Light to medium body, with a refreshing texture. Some fruits may contribute light tannins or additional natural acidity that complements the fermentation. Carbonation varies by declaration. There should be no excessive pulpy aftertaste or unpleasant residue.

Ingredients: *Camellia sinensis* as a base, fresh, frozen, or dehydrated fruit, natural fruit juices or pulp, SCOBY culture, sugar, or sweetener. Fruits can be added during secondary fermentation or as a post-fermentation addition.

Comments: This is one of the most popular categories of kombucha. The selection and quality of the fruit is critical. The timing of addition (during or post-fermentation) affects the final profile. Stability can be a challenge due to additional sugars from the fruit. It is important to control refermentation in the bottle.

Entry Instructions: Participants MUST specify all fruits used and their form (fresh, juice, puree, dried). They MUST indicate the type of tea base. They MUST state the method of adding fruit and the timing. They MUST specify carbonation, sweetness, and acidity levels. They MUST declare any potential allergens.

Varieties: Any natural fruit: red fruits (strawberry, raspberry, blackberry), citrus fruits (lemon, orange, grapefruit), tropical fruits (mango, pineapple, passion fruit), stone fruits (peach, plum), among others.

Vital Statistics:

ABV: 0.0 - 0.5%

Acidity: Low to Medium-High

Residual Sweetness: Low to Medium-High

Carbonation: Variable (Still to Sparkling , as stated)

K4. Alcohol-Free Cereal Kombucha (≤0.5% ABV)

Overall Impression: A kombucha made with a *Camellia base sinensis* , in combination with cereals that provide complexity, body and characteristic notes (toasted, malty, earthy), maintaining the acetic fermentation profile without significant alcohol.

Aroma and Flavor: Aroma where the grain notes are clearly perceptible, which may include toasted, malty, earthy, or grainy nuances depending on the grain and its treatment. These aromas should complement the character of the base tea and the fermentation acidity. On the palate, the grain should provide body and complexity without overpowering the characteristic acetic profile. The balance between residual sweetness, acidity, and grain notes is essential. The finish should be balanced without harsh or overly sweet flavors.

Appearance: Color varies from gold to dark amber, depending on the type of grain and heat treatment applied. It may show slight cloudiness due to grain particles, but excessive sediment should be avoided. The foam may be less persistent than in traditional kombuchas .

Mouthfeel: Medium-light to medium body, more substantial than traditional kombuchas due to the grain content. Texture may include slightly creamy or dry notes depending on the grain. Carbonation varies by brew. Acidity should balance the grain's flavors.

Ingredients: *Camellia sinensis* as a base, cereals in various forms (corn, barley, wheat, rye, rice, quinoa, etc.), which can be macerated, cooked, or fermented before being added. SCOBY culture, sugar for fermentation.

Comments: This category explores the intersection between kombucha and fermented grain beverages. The treatment of the grain (roasting, malting, boiling) significantly affects the profile. It requires care to avoid excess starches that could affect clarity or stability. The integration of grain and acetic fermentation is the main challenge.

Entry Instructions: Entrants MUST specify all grains used and their treatment (steeping, boiling, roasting, malting, etc.). They MUST indicate the type of base tea. They MUST describe the incorporation method and approximate percentages. They MUST declare carbonation, sweetness, and acidity levels.

Varieties: Any appropriate cereal: barley, corn, wheat, rye, rice, oats, quinoa, amaranth, sorghum, among others.

Vital Statistics:

ABV: 0.0 - 0.5%

Acidity: Low to Medium-High

Residual Sweetness: Very Low to Medium

Carbonation: Variable (Still to Sparkling , as stated)

K5. Non-alcoholic Kombucha with Cereals and Fruits (≤0.5% ABV)

Overall Impression: A complex kombucha brewed with *Camellia sinensis* as a base, which combines cereals and fruits to create a balanced sensory profile where both elements are perceptible and complementary, maintaining the fundamental acetic fermentation character.

Aroma and Flavor: A complex aroma where both the cereal and fruit character should be perceptible with medium to high intensity, without either one completely dominating. The toasted, malty, or earthy notes of the cereal should blend harmoniously with the fresh or fermented fruit nuances. Acetic acidity should be present, providing structure. The balance between sweetness, acidity, and the complex cereal and fruit notes is critical. The finish should be satisfying, with a balanced persistence of all elements.

Appearance: Color varies depending on the cereals and fruits used, from golden to darker shades with fruity undertones (pink, reddish, etc.). May show slight cloudiness due to natural cereal and fruit particles. Must maintain an attractive appearance, avoiding excessive sediment.

Mouthfeel: Medium-light to medium body, with more structure than regular kombuchas due to the grain content. A complex texture that can include soft notes of the grain complemented by fruity freshness. Carbonation varies by brand. Acidity should balance the richer grain and fruit flavors.

Ingredients: *Camellia sinensis* as a base, treated cereals (macerated, cooked, fermented), fresh, frozen, dehydrated or juice/pulp fruits, SCOBY culture, sugar or sweetener for fermentation.

Comments: This category represents one of the most complex expressions of non-alcoholic kombucha. It requires careful planning to ensure that grains and fruits complement each other without competing. The timing of the addition of each component is critical. Stability can be challenging due to multiple sources of fermentable sugars.

Entry Instructions: Entrants MUST specify all cereals and fruits used, along with their shapes and treatments. They MUST indicate approximate percentages of each component. They MUST describe incorporation methods and timing. They MUST declare carbonation, sweetness, and acidity levels. They MUST list all potential allergens.

Varieties: Combinations of any appropriate cereal with any natural fruit, selected for complementary profiles.

Vital Statistics:

ABV: 0.0 - 0.5%

Acidity: Low to Medium-High

Residual Sweetness: Low to Medium

Carbonation: Variable (Still to Sparkling , as stated)

K6. JUM Kombucha (honey based)

Overall Impression: A specialty kombucha that uses exclusively honey as the carbohydrate source for fermentation (with no added sugars at any stage), creating a unique profile where the floral, herbal, or spicy characteristics of honey are integrated with the fermentative character of tea, resulting in a distinctive beverage with potential additional benefits from the bioactive compounds in honey.

Aroma and Flavor: Aroma where the character of the honey should be clearly perceptible, with an intensity that can vary from low to high depending on the recipe. Floral, herbal, or spicy notes typical of honey should complement the aroma of the base tea and the acetic notes of the fermentation. On the palate, the honey should provide complexity and roundness, with its characteristic sweetness integrated into the acid profile. The flavor of the tea should remain recognizable. The balance between residual honey sweetness, acidity, and fermentation character is essential. The finish should be clean with a subtle honeyed lingering .

Appearance: Color varies depending on the type of tea and honey used, typically ranging from gold to amber, but can show darker tones with intense honeys. It should be clear to bright, although some honeys may contribute a slight natural cloudiness. The foam is appropriate for the declared carbonation level.

Mouthfeel: Light to medium body, with a texture that may be slightly rounder or smoother due to the properties of honey. Carbonation varies depending on the wine. Acidity should be balanced, but not overpowering.

Ingredients: *Camellia* infusions or mixtures *sinensis* , honey as the sole carbohydrate source (no added sugars), SCOBY culture. Spices, fruits (only for post-fermentation flavoring , no refermentation), or other complementary ingredients may be included depending on the subcategory.

Comments: JUM Kombucha represents a significant innovation that modifies the traditional fermentation profile. The selection of honey (floral, forest, manuka , etc.) significantly impacts the final result. The exclusive use of honey without added sugar is fundamental to the category. When fruits are added, they should be used exclusively for flavoring without promoting additional refermentation . Honey can provide additional benefits from its natural bioactive compounds.

Entry Instructions: Participants MUST specify the type of honey used (floral, multi-floral , specific mono-floral , manuka , etc.). They MUST indicate the type of base tea. They MUST confirm that no added sugars were used. They MUST declare any additional ingredients (spices, fruits). They MUST specify carbonation, sweetness, and acidity levels.

SUBCATEGORIES:

- **K6A: JUM Traditional Kombucha - Black Tea :** Fermented exclusively with black tea and honey, with no added sugar. The malty, robust character of black tea blends with the floral and herbal notes of honey. Golden to amber in color. No added spices, fruits, or other ingredients.
- **K6B: JUM Traditional Kombucha - Green Tea :** Fermented exclusively with green tea and honey, with no added sugar. The fresh, vegetal profile of green tea is complemented by the floral sweetness of honey. Pale greenish-yellow in color. No added spices, fruits, or other ingredients.
- **K6C: Traditional JUM Kombucha - Tea Blend : Fermented with** *Camellia* tea blends *sinensis* and honey exclusively, with no added sugars. It displays complexity derived from the combination of teas balanced with the character of the honey. No additions of spices, fruits, or other ingredients.
- **K6D: JUM Kombucha with Spices and/or Other Ingredients :** Fermented with tea and honey, with the addition of fruits, spices, herbs, flowers, or other botanicals, with no added sugar. The additions should complement the tea and honey profile, creating harmony between all the components.
- **K6E: JUM Kombucha with Alcohol, Fruits, Spices, and/or Other Ingredients :** JUM Kombucha with an alcohol content of >0.5% ABV that may incorporate fruits, spices, or other ingredients, while retaining honey as the sole source of fermentable carbohydrates. It has a complex and balanced profile, combining alcohol, acidity, honey character, and additions.

Vital Statistics:

ABV: Variable according to subcategory

- K6A-K6D: 0.0 - 0.5%
- K6F: >0.5%

Residual Sweetness: Low to Medium

Carbonation: Variable (Still to Sparkling , as stated)

Acidity: Low to Medium-High

K7. Non-Alcoholic Flavored Kombucha (≤0.5% ABV)

Overall Impression: A kombucha made with *Camellia sinensis* , fermented from pure infusions or mixtures, with the addition of multiple flavoring elements (fruits, spices, vegetables, flowers, hops) that create a complex and balanced profile where all the components are perceptible without any one dominating excessively.

Aroma and Flavor: A complex aroma where the character of the additions (fruits, spices, vegetables, flowers, hops) should be expressed with medium to high intensity, balanced with the characteristic acidity of kombucha. Negative descriptors or defects such as alcoholic, sulfurous, sulfuric, or butyric notes are not permitted. On the palate, the multiple flavors should be harmoniously integrated, creating complexity without sensory cacophony. Acidity should be present, providing structure and freshness. The finish should be clean and balanced.

Appearance: Color varies depending on the additions used, from pale to intense hues. It should be clear and attractive, avoiding excessive cloudiness unless characteristic of specific ingredients (such as hops). The foam should be appropriate for the carbonation level.

Mouthfeel: Light to medium body, with a refreshing texture. May show additional complexity from multiple ingredients (light tannins, balanced hop astringency, etc.). Carbonation varies by declaration. Acidity should balance the diverse flavors.

Ingredients: *Camellia sinensis* fermented, combinations of fruits, spices, vegetables, flowers, hops or other aromatic ingredients, SCOBY culture, sugar or sweetener for fermentation.

Comments: This category allows for maximum creativity in flavor combinations. The challenge lies in achieving harmony between multiple elements. Each addition must serve a purpose and contribute to the overall profile without creating oversaturation. Subcategory K7A specifically explores the use of hops, the most common ingredient in beer, adapted for kombucha.

Entry Instructions: Entrants **MUST** specify all additions used (fruits, spices, hops, vegetables, flowers). **MUST** indicate the base tea type. **MUST** describe the concept or inspiration for the blend. **MUST** declare carbonation, sweetness, and acidity levels. **MUST** list all potential allergens. **MUST** specify the types of hops and how they are added.

SUBCATEGORIES:

- **K7A: Non-Alcoholic Kombucha with Hops :** Made with *Camellia sinensis* and the addition of hops in various forms (flower, pellets, extract, etc.). The hop character should be perceptible in the aroma and flavor profile, with notes that may include citrus, herbal, floral, or resinous nuances depending on the variety. There should be a balance between the acidity and character of the base tea.
- **K7B: Non-Alcoholic Kombucha with Flavor Blend :** Made with creative combinations of fruits, spices, vegetables, and/or flowers. The multiple ingredients should be harmoniously integrated, creating complexity without sensory overload. Each element should be perceptible and contribute positively to the overall profile.

Vital Statistics:

ABV: 0.0 - 0.5%

Acidity: Low to Medium

Residual Sweetness: Low to Medium

Carbonation: Variable (Still to Sparkling , as stated)

K8. Non-Alcoholic Kombucha with Coffee (≤0.5% ABV)

Overall Impression: A kombucha made with a *Camellia base sinensis* , fermented from tea infusions, with the addition of coffee in various forms (infusion, ground beans, cold brew , extract), exploring the combination of the fermentative character of kombucha and the complex nuances of coffee.

Aroma and Flavor: Aroma where the coffee's character should be clearly perceptible, with characteristic notes such as toasted notes, cocoa, nuts, caramel, or specific notes depending on the coffee's origin and roast. These notes should blend harmoniously with the aroma of the base tea and the acetic fermentation notes. On the palate, the coffee should provide complexity without completely dominating the fermentation profile. The balance between the coffee's natural bitterness, the kombucha's acidity, and the residual sweetness is critical. The finish should be clean with an integrated coffee lingering aftertaste.

Appearance: Color varies depending on the type of coffee and brewing method, typically ranging from amber to brown. May show darker tones with intense or cold coffees. brew concentrates. Should be clear to slightly cloudy, with an attractive presentation.

Mouthfeel: Light to medium body, with a texture that may be slightly more complex due to the coffee. It may display some balanced astringency from the coffee combined with the refreshing acidity of the kombucha. Carbonation varies by declaration.

Ingredients: *Camellia sinensis* as a base, coffee in various forms (ground beans, hot infusion, cold brew , coffee extract), SCOBY culture, sugar or sweetener for fermentation. Additional ingredients can be added in the K8B subcategory.

Comments: This category explores a sophisticated combination of two traditional beverages. The coffee extraction method (hot brew , cold brew , espresso) significantly affects the final profile. The timing of coffee addition (during fermentation or post-fermentation) influences integration. Coffee freshness is important to avoid rancid or oxidized notes.

Entry Instructions: Participants MUST specify the type of coffee used (origin, roast) and preparation method (hot brew, cold brew) brew , espresso , extract). MUST indicate the type of base tea. MUST describe the method and timing of coffee addition. MUST declare carbonation, sweetness, and acidity levels.

SUBCATEGORIES:

- **K8A: Non-Alcoholic Kombucha with Coffee :** Incorporates exclusively coffee as an additional ingredient to the base tea, without any fruits, spices, vegetables, or flowers. The profile should show a clear integration between the coffee (with its roasted notes, cocoa, nuts, etc.) and the fermentation base, maintaining a flawless sensory balance.
- **K8B: Kombucha with Coffee and Complementary Additions :** Includes coffee along with other complementary ingredients such as fruits, spices, vegetables, or flowers. The additions should be well-integrated, enriching the sensory profile without masking the character of the coffee or kombucha. Harmony and complexity are expected, without aromatic or gustatory oversaturation.

Vital Statistics:

ABV: 0.0 - 0.5%

Acidity: Low to Medium-High

Residual Sweetness: Low to Medium

Carbonation: Variable (Still to Sparkling , as stated)

K9. Traditional Kombucha (>0.5% - ≤6% ABV)

Overall Impression: An alcoholic kombucha made exclusively with *Camellia sinensis* , without the addition of other infusions, fruits, spices, flowers, or additional ingredients. This category seeks to highlight the purity of the tea-based alcoholic ferment, while retaining its identity as a kombucha with greater structural complexity due to the presence of alcohol.

Aroma and Flavor: Characteristic aroma of the tea used (vegetal, malty, floral, and earthy notes, depending on the type) with balanced fermentative acetic notes. The perception of alcohol should be present at low to medium intensity, both in aroma and on the palate, harmoniously integrated with the body and fermentative character. On the palate, the tea flavor should remain recognizable with low to medium acidity that provides freshness. Residual sweetness should be low to medium. The finish should be clean, with the alcohol integrated without generating excessive heat or dominating the aftertaste.

Appearance: Appropriate color for the type of tea used: golden to amber for black tea, greenish yellow for green tea, very pale for white tea, coppery for oolong tea . It should be clear to bright. The foam may vary depending on the stated carbonation level.

Mouthfeel: Light to medium body, with more structure than non-alcoholic kombuchas due to the presence of alcohol and greater fermentation complexity. Clean and balanced texture. Carbonation varies by declaration. The alcohol should provide roundness without creating an excessive heat sensation.

Ingredients: *Camellia sinensis* exclusively (black, green, white, oolong , puerh tea), SCOBY culture with a higher presence of yeasts capable of alcoholic fermentation, sugar or sweetener for fermentation. No additions of other ingredients.

Comments: This category requires careful fermentation control to achieve the desired alcohol level while maintaining the kombucha character. Natural byproducts of alcoholic fermentation, such as esters and alcohols, are acceptable, as they contribute to complexity. Defects such as sulfurous notes, butyric compounds, excessive fusel alcohols , or the presence of significant yeast suspension are not acceptable.

Entry Instructions: Entrants MUST specify the exact type of tea used. MUST specify the yeast type and fermentation process. MUST state the approximate ABV. MUST state the fermentation method and alcohol control. MUST state carbonation, sweetness, and acidity levels. MAY state fermentation time.

Varieties: Any pure variety of *Camellia sinensis* : black, green, white, oolong , puerh , yellow tea.

Vital Statistics:

ABV: >0.5% - ≤6%

Acidity: Low to Medium-High

Residual Sweetness: Low to Medium

Carbonation: Variable (Still to Sparkling , as stated)

K10. Specialty Kombucha with Alcohol (>0.5% - ≤6% ABV)

Overall Impression: An alcoholic kombucha made with a *Camellia* base *sinensis* and/or blends with other infusions, with the addition of fruits, spices, vegetables and/or flowers, creating a complex profile where the additions are harmoniously integrated into the alcoholic fermentation profile.

Aroma and Flavor: A complex aroma where the character of the additions (fruits, spices, vegetables, flowers) should be perceptible and identifiable, complementing the character of the base tea and the fermentation notes. The alcohol should be present at low to medium intensity, integrated into the overall profile. On the palate, the flavors of the additions should be balanced by the natural acidity of the fermented tea and the alcohol perception. Residual sweetness should be low to medium. The finish should show balanced complexity without the alcohol dominating.

Appearance: Color varies depending on the ingredients used, from pale to deep shades. Should accurately reflect the declared additions. Clear to slightly cloudy depending on the ingredients. Attractive and professional presentation.

Mouthfeel: Light to medium body, with structure provided by the alcohol and additions. Balanced texture that may include light fruit tannins, subtle spice astringency, or vegetal freshness. Carbonation varies by declaration. The alcohol should be integrated without generating excessive heat.

Ingredients: *Camellia sinensis* and/or mixtures with other infusions, fruits (fresh, dehydrated, juices, pulps), spices (cinnamon, ginger, cardamom, etc.), vegetables (cucumber, beetroot, carrot, etc.), flowers (hibiscus, lavender, rose, jasmine, etc.), SCOBY culture, sugar or sweetener.

Comments: This category includes versions with greater sensory complexity, where the additions and alcohol must coexist harmoniously. Fermentation byproducts such as esters and alcohols that contribute to the complexity are acceptable. Sulfurous, butyric, or excessively yeasty aromas or flavors are considered defects.

Entry Instructions: Entrants MUST specify all additions used (type and form). MUST indicate the base tea/infusion type. MUST declare the approximate ABV percentage. MUST specify the yeast type and fermentation process. MUST specify the method and timing of ingredient addition. MUST declare carbonation, sweetness, and acidity levels. MUST list potential allergens.

SUBCATEGORIES:

- **K10A: Fruit-Based Kombucha :** Made with the addition of fresh or dried fruit, juices, or pulp. The fruit character should be clearly identifiable and well-integrated into the alcoholic fermentation profile, without overpowering the kombucha base. Balance between fruity freshness, acidity, and alcohol.
- **K10B: Kombucha with Spices and/or Vegetables :** With the addition of spices (cinnamon, ginger, cardamom, cloves, etc.) and/or vegetables (carrot, beetroot, cucumber, among others). These should be in balance with the fermentation base and alcohol, providing complexity without overpowering the beverage.
- **K10C: Floral Grade Kombucha :** Made with fresh or dried flowers (hibiscus, jasmine, lavender, rose, etc.). Their presence should provide elegance and floral complexity without generating excessive, soapy, or artificial perfume notes. A delicate balance of floral notes, acidity, and alcohol is achieved.
- **K10D: High-Grade Kombucha with Addition Blend :** Includes combinations of fruits, spices, vegetables, and/or flowers. There should be a balanced sensory integration between all elements, with no one element disproportionately predominating over the others or over the alcoholic kombucha base. Harmonious complexity.

Vital Statistics:

ABV: >0.5% - ≤6%

Acidity: Low to Medium-High

Residual Sweetness: Low to Medium

Carbonation: Variable (Still to Sparkling , as stated)

K11. Kombucha Traditional Hard (>6% ABV)

Overall Impression: A kombucha High alcohol hard wine , made exclusively with a *Camellia base sinensis* and/or infusions, without the addition of fruits, spices, vegetables, or flowers. This style represents a strong kombucha with an alcohol content of over 6% ABV, which retains its fermentation identity with greater structural and alcoholic complexity.

Aroma and Flavor: Well-defined aroma of the base tea, with present but integrated fermentation acetic notes. The alcohol should be perceptible at low to medium-high intensity, both in aroma and on the palate, but always harmoniously integrated with the body of the beverage. On the palate, the profile should be well-balanced, with low to medium-high acidity that provides structure. Residual sweetness should be low to medium. The alcohol should not dominate the flavor or the aftertaste, but rather contribute complexity, roundness, and structure.

Appearance: Appropriate color for the type of tea or infusion used. It should be clear to bright, without excessive cloudiness. Foam may vary depending on carbonation, typically more persistent due to the higher alcohol content.

Mouthfeel: Medium to medium-full body, with substantial structure provided by the alcohol. Balanced texture without excessive astringency. Carbonation varies by declaration. The alcohol should provide moderate warmth and roundness without being overpowering.

Ingredients: *Camellia sinensis* and/or herbal infusions, SCOBY culture with high-fermentation yeasts, sugar, or sweetener in sufficient quantities to achieve the desired alcohol content. No other ingredients are added.

Comments: This category requires specialized fermentation techniques to achieve and control alcohol levels above 6% while maintaining kombucha character. Byproducts of alcoholic fermentation, such as esters and higher alcohols, are acceptable, provided they contribute to the complexity. Defects such as sulfurous aromas, butyric compounds, excessive fusel alcohols, or the significant presence of yeast in suspension are not acceptable.

Entry Instructions: Entrants MUST specify the type of tea/infusion used. They MUST state their approximate ABV. They MUST describe their yeast, fermentation method, and alcohol control. They MUST specify carbonation, sweetness, and acidity levels. They MAY include information about fermentation and aging time.

Varieties: Any type of *Camellia sinensis* or herbal infusions suitable for controlled alcoholic fermentation.

Vital Statistics:

ABV: >6% (typically 6.2% - 10%)

Acidity: Low to Medium-High

Residual Sweetness: Low to Medium

Carbonation: Variable (Still to Sparkling, as stated)

K12. Kombucha Specialty Hard (>6% ABV)

Overall Impression: A kombucha High alcohol hard wine, made with a *Camellia base sinensis* and/or blends with other infusions, incorporating fruits, spices, vegetables and/or flowers to create a sophisticated and balanced sensory profile, where the integration of alcohol, acidity and additions generates exceptional complexity.

Aroma and Flavor: A complex aroma where the additions (fruits, spices, vegetables, flowers) should be perceptible and well-defined, complementing the fermentation and alcohol characteristics. On the palate, a balanced experience is expected where the flavors of the additions, the natural acidity of the fermentation, and the alcoholic perception coexist harmoniously. Alcohol, present at levels equal to or greater than 6% ABV, should be perceived as low to medium intensity, integrating into the body of the beverage without dominating the flavor or aftertaste. Residual sweetness should be low to medium. The finish should show balanced complexity and elegant persistence.

Appearance: Color varies depending on the ingredients used, and should accurately reflect the declared additions. Clear to slightly cloudy, depending on the nature of the ingredients. Professional and attractive presentation.

Mouthfeel: Medium to medium-full body, with substantial structure provided by the alcohol and complexity from the additions. Balanced texture that may include light tannins, controlled astringency, or complementary sensations depending on the ingredients. Carbonation varies depending on the wine. The alcohol should provide roundness and moderate warmth without being overpowering.

Ingredients: *Camellia sinensis* and/or mixtures with infusions, fruits (fresh, dehydrated, juices, pulps), spices (cinnamon, cloves, ginger, cardamom, etc.), vegetables (beetroot, cucumber, carrot, etc.), flowers (hibiscus, jasmine, lavender, rose, etc.), SCOBY culture with high fermentation yeasts, sugar or sweetener.

Comments: This category represents the most complex expressions of alcoholic kombucha. It requires careful planning to ensure that alcohol, acidity, and additions integrate without competing. Typical byproducts of alcoholic fermentation, such as esters and alcohols, are acceptable as long as they contribute complexity. The presence of sulfur compounds, butyric notes, excessive fusel alcohols, or unwanted yeast residues are considered defects.

Entry Instructions: Entrants MUST specify all additions used (type, form, approximate amounts). MUST indicate the type of tea/base infusion. MUST specify the yeast type and fermentation process. MUST state the approximate ABV. MUST describe the addition methods and timing of additions. MUST specify carbonation, sweetness, and acidity levels. MUST list all potential allergens.

SUBCATEGORIES:

- **K12A: Kombucha Hard with Fruit :** Includes the addition of fresh or dried fruit, juices, or pulp to high-proof kombucha. The fruit character should be clearly perceptible and integrated into the high fermentation and alcohol profile, creating a balance between freshness, acidity, and alcohol structure.

- **K12B: Kombucha Hard with Spices and/or Vegetables** : With additions such as cinnamon, cloves, ginger, cardamom, or vegetables like beets, cucumber, or carrots. These elements should provide sophisticated complexity without being overpowering or dissonant with the higher alcohol content and robust fermentation profile.
- **K12C: Kombucha Hard with Flowers** : Made with dried or fresh flowers (hibiscus, jasmine, lavender, rose, etc.). Its expression should be delicate and elegant, providing refined floral notes without generating artificial or soapy aromas, balanced by a more pronounced alcoholic structure.
- **K12D: Kombucha Hard with Addition Mix** : Includes kombuchas Hard wines that combine two or more types of additions, including fruits, spices, vegetables, and flowers. This is a category of high sensory complexity where the ingredients must be harmoniously integrated, allowing for clear expression of each component without saturation or unbalanced dominance. The profile should show a balance between botanical notes, fermentative character, and high alcohol content.

Vital Statistics:

ABV: >6% (typically 6.2% - 10%)

Acidity: Low to Medium-High

Residual Sweetness: Low to Medium

Carbonation: Variable (Still to Sparkling , as stated)

K13. Experimental Kombucha

Overall Impression: An open category for kombuchas that, due to their formulation, processes, or incorporated ingredients, do not fit into any of the previous categories. Experimental kombuchas are those that integrate non-traditional elements or apply techniques that significantly modify the sensory or technical profile of the beverage, exploring new frontiers while maintaining a recognizable kombucha character.

Aroma and Flavor: The sensory profile can vary widely depending on the experimental concept, but it must always maintain the fundamental character of fermented kombucha as a recognizable base. Experimental elements must be harmoniously integrated into the fermentation profile. Complexity and originality are valued, but the creation of discordant or flawed profiles should be avoided.

Appearance: Appropriate for the ingredients and experimental processes used. May vary widely in color, clarity, and presentation. Must maintain a professional and attractive presentation, reflecting the quality of the innovation.

Mouthfeel: Reflects the fermented base modified by experimental elements. May exhibit unique texture, body, carbonation, or other sensations depending on the experimental concept. Should remain pleasant and drinkable.

Ingredients: *Camellia sinensis* as a base (may be combined or modified), plus any experimental ingredients or processes. This may include: non-traditional alternative grains, innovative concentration techniques, fermentation with single or mixed cultures, maturation in special vessels (barrels, amphorae), use of modern ingredients (seaweed, plant proteins, superfoods), unconventional infusion techniques, alternative sweeteners (maple syrup, coconut sugar, panela, etc.), blending with other fermented beverages, or unique combinations of traditional elements.

Comments: This category encourages innovation and experimentation within the spirit of kombucha. Examples might include: kombuchas with ancient grains, cold brewing techniques, and Applied brews , infusions with specialty coffee , use of superfood ingredients, hybrids with other fermented beverages (beer, cider, wine, mead), barrel techniques aging , spontaneous fermentations, co-fermentations , or any concept that pushes traditional boundaries while maintaining the character of fermented kombucha.

Entry Instructions: Entrants MUST clearly specify the experimental concept and justify why their product falls into this category. They MUST detail all unique ingredients and/or processes used. They MUST explain the inspiration or goal of the experiment. They MUST specify any tea base and its type. They MUST declare carbonation, sweetness, acidity, and % ABV levels. They MUST list all potential allergens. They MAY provide additional context regarding the product's development.

SUBCATEGORIES:

- **K13A: Experimental Non-Alcoholic Kombuchas ($\leq 0.5\%$ ABV)** : Non-alcoholic kombuchas made with *Camellia sinensis* and/ or other infusions, which incorporate ingredients or techniques not included in other categories. Alternative sweeteners, ancient grains, innovative brewing techniques, extended fermentation, woods, or other

differentiating elements may be used. The sensory profile may include unique notes, while maintaining balance and the recognizable character of kombucha.

- **K13B: Experimental Alcoholic Kombuchas (>0.5% ABV)** : Alcoholic kombuchas made with *Camellia sinensis* and/or other infusions, with creative additions, unconventional aging processes, mixed fermentations, or blends with other fermented beverages (beer, cider, wine, mead). The profile should retain recognizable kombucha traits, complemented by innovations. Fermentation esters and alcohols are acceptable as part of the complexity.
- **K13C: Experimental Kombuchas with Mixed or Hybrid Techniques** : Brews that integrate kombucha with other fermentation matrices such as beer, cider, wine, mead, vermouth , or other beverages. These kombuchas must achieve a harmonious sensory integration where the characteristics of the kombucha coexist in balance with the attributes of the beverage with which it has been mixed or co-fermented . A balance between body, acidity, sweetness, and alcohol content is achieved with clean technical execution.

Vital Statistics:

ABV: Variable (0.0% - 12% or more, depending on design)

Residual Sweetness: Variable (Dry to Sweet, depending on design)

Acidity: Variable (Low to High, depending on design)

Carbonation: Variable (Still to Sparkling , depending on design)

K14. Functional Kombucha

Overall Impression: Traditional kombuchas enriched with functional ingredients that provide potential health benefits beyond the enjoyment and natural probiotics of fermentation. Should maintain the character and palatability of traditional kombucha while adding specific nutritional or functional value, with viable live microorganisms at the time of consumption.

Aroma and Flavor: The kombucha character should remain dominant and recognizable as the fundamental foundation. Functional ingredients may not be perceptible in the flavor, or if they are, they should be well integrated, creating interesting complexity without medicinal, artificial, or off-flavors. Some ingredients can contribute positive characteristics: adaptogens (balanced herbal notes), antioxidants (subtle fruit complexity), among others. The fermentation acidity should be clear and refreshing.

Appearance: Color may vary depending on added functional ingredients and base style. Some additives may naturally affect color: turmeric (deep gold), spirulina (greenish), berry antioxidants (reddish hues), chlorella (green), etc. Should remain clear and appealing unless cloudiness is inherent to specific ingredients. No excessive sediment.

Mouthfeel: Typical body of the base style with no significant negative alterations. Some ingredients can positively enrich the texture: prebiotics (slightly stronger body), proteins (fuller mouthfeel). Should not create unpleasant, gritty, or excessively viscous sensations. Carbonation appropriate for the style.

Ingredients: Quality Kombucha base made with *Camellia sinensis* , active SCOBY culture, plus functional ingredients such as: specific additional probiotics (Lactobacillus, Bifidobacterium) , prebiotics (inulin, FOS, fibers), vitamins (C, B- complex , D), minerals (electrolytes, magnesium, zinc), antioxidants (superfruit extracts , green tea, cocoa), adaptogens (ashwagandha , ginseng, rhodiola , maca), collagen, vegetable proteins, omega-3, digestive enzymes, medicinal plant extracts (echinacea, ginger, turmeric), or superfoods (spirulina , chlorella , matcha).

Comments: To qualify in this category, kombucha MUST meet:

- Contain live microorganisms in viable quantities at the time of consumption (without pasteurization or aggressive filtration that eliminates probiotics)
- Include functional ingredients with scientific evidence of beneficial properties
- Do not include artificial additives (colorings, synthetic flavorings, preservatives) that compromise functionality
- Maintain low or moderate residual sugar levels
- Clearly state the expected functional benefit

Functional ingredients must provide significant benefits, not merely be symbolic. Stability during fermentation and storage can be challenging. Some vitamins are sensitive to light, pH, and alcohol. Additional probiotics require special conditions for viability. Health claims must comply with local regulations. May require refrigeration or special handling.

Entry Instructions: Entrants MUST specify all functional ingredients used with approximate concentrations and intended purpose (specific benefit). MUST specify base kombucha style. MUST confirm presence of viable live microorganisms. MUST indicate method and timing of incorporation of functional ingredients. MUST declare carbonation, sweetness, acidity, and % ABV levels. MUST declare all potential allergens and known drug interactions. MAY provide information on expected functional benefits supported by evidence.

Varieties: Any functional ingredient recognized as safe for human consumption and compatible with kombucha fermentation, subject to local regulations on functional foods and health claims .

Vital Statistics:

ABV: Variable (0.0% - 6%, depending on base design)

Carbonation : Variable (Still to Sparkling, depending on design)

Acidity: Low to Medium (depending on base style)

Residual Sweetness: Low to Medium (preferably controlled)

FINAL REMINDER

This guide represents an evolving framework for evaluating kombuchas for competitions and certifications. Responsible innovation is encouraged, but all products must maintain food safety, comply with local regulations, and provide a positive consumer experience that honors the tradition of fermentation while embracing the diversity of styles, innovation, and modern wellness needs.

This guide is complementary to other fermented beverage categorization tools and seeks to establish professional standards for the ever-evolving kombucha industry.

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