



# Closer Inspection

A **pH meter** measures a batch's acidity levels during fermentation. "The more acid there is, the less sugar," Schneider says.



**Standard Reference Solutions** help calibrate the meter. For tea, Schneider aims for a pH level between 2.9 and 3.45. "If we're looking for some extra sourness we might" let it ferment an extra day or so.

After kombucha is fermented, flavors from **fresh fruit**, vegetables and herbs are added before bottling. Produce is ordered through the nonprofit D.C. Central Kitchen's Fresh Start catering company. The team makes more than 1,000 gallons of kombucha weekly.



Carbon dioxide from a **10-pound tank** is used during the bottling process to extend the drink's shelf life. Without it, "the freshness of the flavor would disappear within a week or so," Schneider says.

## Sip on this

### How Capital Kombucha brews its teas

BY KRIS CORONADO

**Arriving at George Washington University's** business school two years ago, Andreas Schneider was carrying more than his textbooks. He was doling out samples of kombucha, an amber-colored fermented tea that he had brewed in his U Street apartment. "I had no idea what kombucha was," recalls John Lee, Schneider's former MBA classmate. "So when I first tried it, it was [like], 'Is this what's supposed to taste like?'" The drink was bitter and, well, Schneider admits, "unpleasant."

But those sour times are a distant memory. In spring 2012, Schneider, Lee and fellow recent GWU graduate Dan Lieberman incorporated Capital Kombucha ([Capitalkombucha.com](http://Capitalkombucha.com)), the District's first kombucha brewery. While the drink, widely believed to have originated from China, is often lauded for its perceived probiotic health benefits, the trio was determined that its nonalcoholic product would taste good. "We didn't want it to be an 'eat your veggies' drink," Schneider says. "We wanted it to be something that you

would see in the cooler next to a cola or a sugary iced tea or energy drink, and you choose it based strictly on taste, and then a bonus is you're not loading your body with high-fructose corn syrup." Flavors include basil lemongrass and coconut water. Here, we visit their space in Northeast Washington's Union Kitchen.

For the mint-lime blend, Schneider estimates the team processes 170 limes a week through its **Hamilton Beach commercial juicer**. "We'll do a couple hundred limes a day in a half-hour," he says.

Two 50-square-foot tents house twenty 50-gallon plastic **drums** of fermenting kombucha. Inside the tent, the tea is shielded from light and stays at optimal temperatures for fermentation, between 75 and 85 degrees Fahrenheit.



During fermentation, a culture composed of a symbiotic colony of bacteria and yeast, or SCOBY, processes sugar added to the tea. A SCOBY resembles a pancake and adapts to the size of the container. SCOBYs are reusable, says Schneider: "Some people dry them out and make clothes out of them."



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