The Rainbow of Mould

So, your ferments could possibly grow mould, which can be disconcerting, but is usually no cause for alarm. There are several types of mould and yeast that can occur and the easy way to identify what to do with each kind falls into the colour and appearance of the mould/yeast.

**1. Harmless yeasts:** these will always be white or very pale cream and are generally a yeast arising from one of the following two things. Firstly, an over excitable SCOBY like water kefir can produce yeasty froth or scum which can just be skimmed off. This usually occurs because you’ve fed the grains brown sugar or fruit with lots of nutrients and will resolve when they get a more refined or balanced diet. You will also often see a particular yeast called kahm yeast that forms a thin white scum and sometimes even amazing bubble-gum style bubbles on top of ferments, usually brine ferments like kvass or torshi. If this happens, just skim off and don’t worry at all as it’s natural. If it comes back, don’t worry and probably don’t bother to take it off this time. It usually happens when fermentation is quite quick and most of the available sugars have been used up. it’s often a sign that your ferment is ready for the fridge.

**2. Harmless moulds** that taste a bit yucky: these are the familiar blue/green/grey moulds that you get on top of jam or cut cheese that’s been forgotten in the fridge. They aren’t a problem health-wise, so don’t worry, but do remove them from the ferment with a clean spoon as soon as possible. If there is a layer of mould on the top of a kraut style ferment, then remove the top layer and replace a clean follower and weight to make sure the kraut is submerged in brine. it might happen because the surface of the kraut dried out or there were bits on the side of the jar. if there is mould on the inside of the jar, just wipe it clean with a piece of kitchen paper and a little vinegar. If you need to top up the brine then either use fermented brine from another pickle, or make a 3-5% brine and add a teaspoon of live cider vinegar or lemon juice to bring the acidity to the right level.

**3. Potentially harmful moulds:** bright yellow, orange, red, pink or black moulds: Although these aren’t always harmful moulds (you sometimes get orange pink moulds on cheese), the fact that they are occurring on vegetables is a caution and I would always discard these ferments and chalk it up to experience. Although it’s very rare to come to harm from fermented vegetables, if the ph of your ferment was too high for too long (not acidic enough) then something undesirable could potentially set up home. As long as you make sure you exclude air pockets from your ferments and give them the right conditions to ferment (submerged below brine, anaerobic, fermented at temperatures between 18-22ºC) then you are very unlikely to come across these moulds, ever.