

Kimchi (Korean-style Spicy Cabbage Pickle) (v, gf)

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I first published this recipe in our newsletter (still available online), and while the basics have remained unchanged, my practice working with this culture has offered a few useful insights. When I began writing this cookbook, I was only really thinking about recipes, but somewhere in my mind, the actual practice of working mindfully with what feeds you also presented itself. In fact, on a very basic level, making this pickle is feeding a culture, and on a slightly more complex level, you are entering into a mutually beneficial relationship with certain microorganisms.

Once you have a batch going, you can in fact add more to it as you go, and continue to develop the culture and keep it alive for much longer than each individual batch might last. If you try your own homemade kimchi and decide it's just not for you as printed in this recipe here, consider trying the same process but altering the ingredients a bit (different brassica family vegetables, peppers, or fruit; more or less salt or aromatics, or anything else your imagination might present). Live-culture foods that you make yourself can be very satisfying as condiments and snacks, and they will help maintain a healthy digestive tract.

Kimchi is usually made with Korean salted shrimp and fish sauce, but this version is completely vegan. The first time I made this recipe, it was fairly simple and plain. Many thanks to Patrick Park, who suggested the addition of other ingredients for balance and flavor.

Makes about 2 quarts (enough to enjoy for several meals)

Time: The time spent prepping vegetables and attending the kimchi is about an hour. However, you need at least 4 days to complete the pickling process, and kimchi will improve with age and care for an additional month or longer. I recommend starting 7 to 10 days before you intend to use it. If making it for personal home use, you can snack on it every day until it runs out, and it will likely taste better each time.

Equipment: 2 quart-sized mason jars, or other jars with tight-sealing lids, and a glass baking dish to set them in (to avoid a kimchi cleanup work retreat)

Ingredients

2 lbs Napa cabbage (sometimes labeled Asian or Chinese cabbage) Note: This is not the same as bok choy. While bok choy may be just as good, it will not have the same flavor. Feel free to use red or white cabbage, collards, mustard, or combine any or all with the Napa. If you can't find Napa, just use whatever cabbage is available to you.

½ cup salt (I use table-grind sea salt. I would not recommend flavored salts; as in brewing beer, kimchi amplifies whatever flavors are added to it.)

8 ounces daikon radish, sliced into 2-inch matchsticks (the flavor will be different with small radishes, and I find it to be a little more work, but use regular radishes if daikon is not available)

1 bunch green onion, cut into 1-inch pieces (use both green and white parts, discarding only the tiny root hairs on the end)

1/3 cup Korean red pepper powder (or plain red chili flakes)

¼ cup tamari (I use San-J Organic, Gluten-Free, Low-Sodium Tamari, but plain soy sauce will do)

¼ cup minced fresh ginger (and/or fresh turmeric, and/or fresh galangal)

6-8 cloves fresh garlic, minced

1 heaping T red miso paste (available at most Asian markets, health food stores, and even some conventional grocery stores)

½ T organic raw sugar (or plain white sugar, if you prefer)

1 medium Granny Smith or other tart apple, peeled, cored, and thinly sliced (optional)

1 pear, peeled, cored, and thinly sliced (preferably unripe; optional)

2-4 small fresh red and/or green chili peppers, minced (seeds, stems, and pith removed) If you like more heat and don't mind the extra prep work, use 6 or more red Thai chilies or other tiny spicy-hot chili peppers. For less heat, just use fresh jalapeños, or skip the chilies altogether.

1. Wash your hands thoroughly before doing any of these steps, or wear clean gloves. Any dirt or germs can compete with the live culture that you will be growing, possibly causing sickness and at the very least making for kimchi that doesn't taste or smell right. Cut the cabbage in half lengthwise, then crosswise into 2-inch pieces. Discard the root end. Place cabbage pieces in a large bowl, and add the salt. Toss with your hands until the cabbage is thoroughly coated with salt. Add just enough cold water to cover the cabbage completely, then cover with plastic wrap, a lid or pan, or anything that covers the bowl completely, and let it sit at room temperature for 12 to 24 hours (closer to 24 has worked better for me, but don't let it sit longer than a day).
2. Prepare the rest of your fruits, vegetables, and herbs, and store covered in the refrigerator until you are ready to add them to the cabbage. This is the most time-consuming step but can be done any time before step 4.
3. Drain the cabbage in a colander in the sink, and *lightly* rinse with cold water. Do not wash salt or microorganisms off of the cabbage—kimchi needs both of these things in order to work. Just gently squeeze some of the extra moisture out after the *light* rinsing, and return the cabbage to your bowl. *Salt is a microorganism inhibitor, as well as a preservation ingredient. More salt will slow the pickling, and less or no salt will speed it up. Also, no-salt kimchi will not keep as long and tends to be softer, while salted kimchi maintains some crispness for longer.
4. Mix in all the remaining ingredients (I use my hands, but you can use a large spoon if you prefer), making sure that the cabbage is well coated. Pack the mixture tightly into clean jars, leaving a little air space at the top. This extra space will reduce the chances of the kimchi leaking from the top. Seal the jars with tight-fitting lids, and leave them in a dark, cool place (such as a basement, pantry, or cellar) for about another 24 hours. During this time, the fermentation may be rapid, causing bubbling, strange noises, and leaking juices (not unlike a restless mind at the beginning of a retreat, which is the reason for placing the jars in a safe and easily cleansed container, such as a glass baking dish).
5. Open the jars just enough to release the gases. (This is a little like opening a soda bottle, and I find that wrapping rubber bands around both the jars and their lids makes this step easier, so do it in a sink or tub, over a towel, or outside.) Reseal the jars and place them, still in the baking dish (unless you want kimchi juice in the bottom of

your fridge), in the refrigerator for at least 48 hours. If you can wait a few more days, up to a week of slow, sealed fermentation will yield a much more balanced result.

The kimchi will keep, sealed in the fridge after opening, for about a month. However, if you are careful with cleanliness, you can use an old batch and add it to a new partial batch to not only extend its life but also improve its flavor: just add the aged kimchi to the mixing bowl in step 4. Although I think it can be good by itself, you will most likely want to use this as a condiment for stir-fries, soups, or salads, as its flavor can be difficult to adjust to initially.