





YOU'LL NEED

1 large head of napa cabbage (Chinese cabbage)
½ cup coarse sea salt

Spicy sauce

½ cup coarse Korean red pepper powder
3 cloves of garlic, peeled and finely chopped
5cm (2in) piece of ginger root, peeled and finely chopped
½ medium pear, peeled and cored
1 tbs sesame seeds
¼ cup (60mL) jeotgal (fish juice)

ORIGINS

Kimchi dates back to antiquity when vegetables were salted to ensure a winter food supply. Chilli peppers probably came to Korea in the late 16th century when Japan invaded the country. Initially viewed with scepticism and thought to be poisonous, spicy vegetables were commonplace by the 1800s, as was adding salted seafood to kimchi. The final key ingredient in today's kimchi, napa cabbage, arrived in Korea via China about 100 years ago.

SOUTH KOREA

KIMCHI

MAKES ABOUT 8 CUPS

What happens when the world's favourite spicy fruit – the red chilli pepper – meets humdrum cabbage? Kimchi, that's what – the salty, spicy, fermented staple of this tiny Asian nation.

METHOD

- 1 Cut the cabbage lengthwise. Cut each piece again to make four quarters and discard the stem. Chop the cabbage into 1cm (2/5in) pieces.
- 2 Place the cabbage in a large stainless steel bowl, sprinkle on the salt and mix together with your hands. Let it sit 1–2 hours, or until the cabbage is slightly tender, but not wilted.
- 3 Wash and drain the cabbage three times, then place in a colander and drain for 1 hour.
- 4 Place the sauce ingredients in a blender. Blitz to a fine consistency then let it sit for at least 10 minutes.
- 5 Place the drained cabbage in a large

stainless steel bowl. Add the sauce and mix together with your hands (use plastic gloves to protect your hands).

6 Pack the cabbage into plastic containers (or mason jars) with tight-fitting lids. This is fresh kimchi and it's ready to eat.

7 For a deeper, more pungent flavour, let it stand at room temperature for 48 hours, then refrigerate. The longer it sits, the more pungent and sour the flavour and aroma.

TIP This is a simplified recipe for fast kimchi. You'll get genuine kimchi with less fuss. All of the speciality ingredients can be purchased at a Korean grocer.

TASTING NOTES

Kimchi is a gastronomic enigma wrapped in a leaf. First encounters are rarely enticing; the acrid aroma can knock back even the most adventurous foodie. Suppress that gag reflex and you'll be rewarded with crunchy leaves covered with a piquant mélange of hard-to-identify flavours that vary slightly with each bite. To experience kimchi's versatility, and Korea's lively dining culture, head to a barbecue–meat restaurant. Billowing smoke from charcoal briquettes, the crackle of sizzling pork and the din of soju (distilled alcohol)–inspired chatter all signal the beginning of an exceptional dinner. On your own tabletop BBQ, grill kimchi until golden. Use the tongs to place pork, garlic and roasted kimchi on a garden–fresh sesame leaf. Wrap it. Eat it. Relish it. ● by Rob Whyte

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