



BAECHU (CABBAGE) KIMCHI RECIPE

This is a basic kimchi to illustrate the process. Definitely feel free to experiment with different vegetables and proportions.

TIMEFRAME:

3 days to weeks or months

VESSEL:

1-quart/1-liter jar

INGREDIENTS (for 1 quart/1 liter):

6 tablespoons/90 grams sea salt

2 pounds/1 kilogram napa cabbage (½–1 head)

1 tablespoon rice flour (optional)

2–4 tablespoons (or more!) gochugaru, Korean chili powder, and/or fresh or dried chilies

1 bunch scallions or 1 onion or leek or a few shallots (or more!)

3–4 cloves garlic (or more!)

2 tablespoons (or more!) fresh-grated gingerroot

PROCESS:

Coarsely chop the cabbage and place it in a bowl or pot, along with any other vegetables you might wish to include, but not the spices.

Mix a strong brine of about 4 cups (1 liter) of water and salt. Stir well to thoroughly dissolve the salt. The brine should taste very salty. If you want to use taste as a guide, think seawater.

Pour the brine over the vegetables. Firmly press the vegetables down with your hands a few times to get them submerged. If it seems like there's not quite enough water to cover the vegetables, don't worry; the salt will pull more water out of the vegetables and there will be plenty. Cover the vegetables with a plate, place a full jar or other weight on it, and press firmly every few minutes until the vegetables are fully submerged. Leave the vegetables in their brine on the kitchen counter a few hours or overnight.

Make a paste. This step is optional. It gives kimchi a red pasty saucy quality, but you can make great kimchi without it if you want to keep it simple. In a small saucepan, mix the rice flour with ½ cup/125 milliliters of cold water. Stir thoroughly to dissolve the flour and break up clumps. Gently heat, stirring constantly to prevent burning. Keep stirring as the rice flour mix starts to cook and thicken. Cook for a few minutes until the mix achieves a gluey pastiness, but remains thin enough to pour. If it seems too thick, add a little hot water and stir well. Once it's cooled to body temperature (during which time it will further thicken), mix this with the chili powder into a bright red paste, and then incorporate the rest of the spices described below.

Prepare the spices. Grate the ginger; chop the garlic and onion; remove the seeds from the chilies and chop or crush, or throw them in whole. To make a Korean-style red pasty kimchi, use the Korean-style chili powder. Kimchi can absorb a lot of spice. Experiment with quantities and don't worry too much about them. Mix spices into a paste. If you wish, add a small amount of fish sauce to the spice paste.

Drain the water off the vegetables. Really let them drain, and even press them lightly to force water out. Taste the vegetables for saltiness. That initial salting mostly pulls water out of the vegetables, but not much of it absorbs into them. If you cannot taste salt, add 1–2 teaspoons salt to the spice paste. In the unlikely event that the vegetables are too salty, rinse them.

Mix the vegetables with the spice paste. Mix everything together well.

Pack the kimchi into a jar. Use a clean quart-size (liter) jar. Pack it tightly into the jar, pressing down until paste or liquid rises to cover the vegetables. Fill the jar almost all the way to the top, leaving a little space for expansion. If there is extra

spiced vegetable mix, use it to fill a smaller jar. Press down repeatedly to get the vegetables fully submerged. Screw the top on the jar.

Ferment in a visible spot on the kitchen counter. Be sure to loosen the top to relieve pressure each day for the first few days. While you are there, use your (clean!) fingers to push the vegetables back under the brine, and after a few days taste the kimchi. Once it tastes ripe to you, move it to the refrigerator. Or if you have a cellar or other cool spot, ferment kimchi more slowly and for much longer. At the Flack Family Farm in northern Vermont, I enjoyed three-year-old kimchi that had been aging all that time in their cellar.