

Kimchi, Info 1 (Engl.)

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Anleitung:

Kimchi is the most famous of these. Kimchi is the name given to any one of hundreds of spicy pickles. It is a part of nearly every meal, and its production is an ancient and revered art. The most famous kind of kimchi is made with napa cabbage, but Koreans make it from radishes, fish, squid, cucumber, eggplant, radish greens, fruit -the list could go on and on. The vegetables or fish is pickled in a mixture that may include, among other things, coarse salt, chile, ginger, garlic, fish sauce, and water. The whole is sealed into an earthenware pot or jar to ferment until ready to eat. Korean food is often extremely spicy, for in the 16th century, Korean cooks were seduced by the chile, which the Portuguese introduced. To most Koreans a meal without kimchi would be incomplete, or even unthinkable. In all its variations, kimchi provides the Korean diet with essential vitamins as well as a distinctive flavor that invariably draws strong reactions from the first-time taster.

Distractors protest that their nostrils and taste buds are overwhelmed by the garlic and hot red peppers that season the bestknown cabbage and turnip kimchi. Aficionados find the assault on their senses sheer delight and keep coming back for more. There is no mention of the use of garlic or red peppers in legends about the origin of kimchi or in early historical records of kimchi making. Its name appears with variant spelling as chimchae, chinjang, and Chimjang, but all share the same meaning of "vegetables soaked on salt water." (No garlic, no red peppers.) The origin of kimchi is attributed to a poor farmer who carried several old heads of cabbage to the sea to wash and freshen them. He noticed that these rather meager heads seemed to grow bulkier after sitting in the salty water, and decided he was onto something great. If a short washing in sea water made them a little heavier wouldn't an overnight soaking make them a lot heavier? His puny cabbage would become hearty and he would have more food for himself and his family. He left the cabbages to soak and returned expectantly the next morning, only to find that the pot he had left them in was half empty. He swore revenge on the cruel thief, not realizing that it was the salt in the water that had brought about the change in the contents of the pot and not a criminal. Perhaps driven by despair, the farmer tore off a leaf from the wilted cabbage heads and popped it in his mouth. Yummmmm! Kimchi was born, but without garlic or red peppers.

A poem by a noted literary figure of the Koryo Dynasty, Lee Kyu Bo (1168-1241), describes the preparation of turnips an salt water for storage and use during the winter months, but once again without the use of garlic and red peppers. Some historians feel that additional seasonings, notably the red peppers, were not added to the preserving pots of salted cabbages and turnips until the 16th century, when the cultivation of red peppers became wide spread in Korea.

In the years since then, increased prosperity and culinary creativity have wrought many changes to the original kimchi recipe. It is no longer just garlic and red peppers that find their way into kimchi pots, but a whole host of other ingredients, ranging from the common to the exotic - green onions, carrots, leeks, ginger, sesame

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seeds, pears, oysters, salted baby shrimp, chestnuts, abalone, pinenuts, seaweed, and the list goes on.

While greater financial security has made the use of more exotic and expensive ingredients in kimchi possible, it has also made the home preparation of kimchi less necessary. Hot house provide vegetables year round. Factory-made kimchi can be purchased at the local grocery store. And urban apartment living makes largescale kimchi production unfeasible. Making kimchi for a family of five once required the purchase of at least 100 heads of cabbage. Today the same sized family, at least in urban areas, will use only 30.

To the casual observer in Seoul during the latter part of November and early December this decline in kimchi making, called "kimjang," would go unnoticed. Trucks abundant with fresh cabbages and turnips are everywhere and small makeshift markets seem to sprout overnight throughout the city. Many companies still give their employees "kimchi bonuses" at this time of year to cover the large outlay of money required to buy all the ingredients for winter kimchi making.

For those hoping to learn and see more varieties of kimchi while in Seoul might be interested in a visit to the Kimchi Museum located in the Samsung-dong area, not far from KOEX. There you might see sample 'possam kimchi', a specialty from Käsong. "Possam" means "wrapped", and in this recipe the salt-soaked cabbage leaves enclose a filling of chopped turnips, raw oysters, chestnuts, black mushrooms, parsley, ginger, garlic, onions, pears, apples, cucumbers, pinenuts, salted baby shrimp, and, of course, red peppers. And bächu kimchi, kakdugi (cubed turnips/ radishes with kimchi seasonings), chonggak kimchi (whole radishes with stems and leaves in kimchi seasonings), and oi sobägi (whole cucumbers stuffed with the kimchi seasonings) and... Well, there are over 100 varieties to choose from in Korea!