

Kimchi

Contributed by Judith

Beat a glut and spice up your meals with Judith's Korean vegetable pickle instructions.

What do you do when the greenhouse is full of Chinese cabbage and you need the space for peppers? One possibility is kimchi – the Korean hot and sour brined pickle, used as a condiment at every meal. I find it goes particularly well with fried rice and noodle soups, although I have not yet been brave enough to eat it for breakfast.

The basis of any kimchi is Chinese cabbage, but I like to add one or two other crunchy vegetables to the mix – carrots and mooli (daikon) radish are particularly good.

This recipe uses around 2 pounds of cabbage. If you have never tried fermented pickles before, perhaps halve the quantities and see if you like it before making the larger amount.

The basic recipe:

2 pints water

3 Tbs fine sea salt (don't use table salt as the additives can make the brine rather murky)

2 lb Chinese cabbage (probably 2 heads)

Two medium carrots and/or an equivalent weight of mooli radish

6 spring onions

Fresh ginger

Dried chilli flakes

1 tsp sugar

Chop the Chinese cabbage into roughly 2-inch squares. It is the crunchy rib in the middle that you want most, so cut off the green leafy edges if you think there is too much.

When you get to the heart, cut into quarters and then chop the quarters into 2-inch pieces.

Put in a large bowl.

Chop your carrots into 2-inch matchsticks …

… and slice the radishes, if using.

(The observant among you will note that these are French Breakfast radishes, rather than mooli. This was not such a good idea as the red skins turned the brine slightly pink).

Dissolve 2 Tbs plus 2 tsp salt in two pints of water. Pour this brine over the vegetables. Don't worry if it doesn't entirely cover the cabbage, simply put a plate on top to keep everything in place and weight down if necessary. Leave to stand for 12 hours or so. When you take the plate off, you should find that the vegetables have already given off a lot of liquid and have started to wilt slightly.

Now cut the spring onions into 2-inch lengths and then into slivers. Peel and finely dice a chunk of ginger - you want roughly 1 Tbs altogether (adjust up or down if you love/loathe ginger).

Drain the vegetables, reserving all the liquid. Put into a tall, non-reactive pot or jar. (A large Le Parfait or Kilner jar will do fine if you are only making a small amount of kimchi.)

Add the spring onions and ginger. Add chilli flakes to taste. If you have access to the mild, Korean chilli flakes, then add lots – a tablespoon would not be too much. If the variety you use blows off the top of your head, then be more circumspect, say 1 tsp. You do want the end result to be quite hot, though, so be bold.

Mix together, then add the remaining 2 tsp salt and 1 tsp sugar, plus enough of the brine to just cover the vegetables.

Put the rest of the brine in a clean, resealable bag. Use this to close off the top of your jar. The idea is that it keeps out the yeasts and bugs in the air that would spoil your kimchi, but allows any bubbles due to fermentation to escape. By filling the bag with the extra brine, rather than plain water, you ensure that the brine won't be diluted if the bag should leak.

Leave the kimchi to sour for 3 – 6 days in a warmish room. The longer you leave it, the more sour it will be, so test it after 3. If you think the seasonings are lacking in punch at this stage, add some more chilli or ginger.

When it is as sour as you want it, simply seal the jar if you used a Le Parfait type. Otherwise ladle into sterilised jars and cap tightly. This type of pickle can’t be heat-treated, so store in the fridge or a very cool larder, where it will keep for months.

Serve as a condiment or as an ingredient in its own right.

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