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Our Mildly Insane Kimchi Bokkeumbap

KIMCHI FRIED RICE

Bacon. We kept coming back to bacon when talking about this kimchi fried-rice recipe. Bacon is quintessential Americana. Our kimchi fried rice needed bacon, and for months we tested and were continually disappointed that the essence of bacon—Americana!—was being muted by either too much rice or too much kimchi. Then it came to us. We needed to use more bacon! Like a lot more. Like how French chefs view mashed potatoes: equal parts butter and potatoes. That's scary, right? Also scary good.

We went that direction here and by the grace of god and Allan Benton did this ever work. The crispy rice unites with the decadent gochujang butter, while the bacon is there just being wonderful. And remember, the key to good fried rice is using cold day-old rice, which is nice and dried out and gives you a much better fry. So the next time you order takeout, get an extra order of rice and keep it in the fridge for a day or so. And if you didn't plan ahead, no sweat. Make some rice and lay it out on a sheet tray and freeze until cold.

SERVES 2

½ pound of slab bacon, roughly chopped
1 medium onion, cut into small dice
2 garlic cloves, minced
1-inch knob of ginger, minced
1½ cups chopped extra-aged Napa Cabbage Kimchi (*see recipe below*)
2 cups cooked rice, preferably day-old
1 tablespoon gochujang (*see below*)
2 tablespoons butter, softened
2 eggs, fried sunnyside-up
2 scallions, sliced thin

1. In a large skillet, wok or cast-iron pan over high heat, cook the bacon, stirring, until fat is fully rendered and the bacon is barely starting to crisp. Pour out all but 2 tablespoons fat.
2. Add onion, garlic and ginger and sauté for 1 minute, or until very aromatic. Add chopped kimchi and rice and sauté, stirring frequently, for 4 to 5 minutes, or until very hot. Drop the heat to medium-low and flatten the rice with your spatula. Continue to cook until the bottom layer is crispy, about 2 minutes; think Spanish paella here. The longer you leave it, the more crispy the bottom will become, but be careful not to burn the garlic.
3. While the rice continues to crisp, in a small bowl mix together the gochujang and softened butter.
4. Serve from the pan or wok, topped with fried eggs, sliced scallions and gochujang butter.

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a MOUTHFUL

NAPA CABBAGE KIMCHI

Makes about 2 quarts

FOR THE CABBAGE

12 cups water
1 cup coarse sea salt
1 large napa cabbage (2 to 3 pounds)

FOR THE RICE FLOUR PASTE

2 tablespoons sweet rice flour
1 cup water

FOR THE MARINADE

1 small onion, roughly chopped
½ cup roughly chopped, peeled Asian pear
2-inch knob of ginger, roughly chopped
6 garlic cloves, minced
4 Korean red chile peppers, trimmed and cut in half
¼ cup water
½ cup salted fermented shrimp
¼ cup sugar
½ cup rice flour paste
1 cup coarsely ground gochugaru (*see info below*)
1 bunch scallions, green parts only, thinly sliced
1 carrot, grated
½ cup peeled and grated daikon radish

1. **BRINE THE CABBAGE:** In a large container, combine 12 cups of cold water and the sea salt. Cut the napa cabbage head lengthwise, then into quarters. Place in the salt water and brine for 6 hours at room temperature. The brining step both adds flavor and opens the cabbage's pores, allowing the marinade to soak in. Rinse in cold water and have a little bite. If you would prefer it saltier, brine for another 6 hours to overnight; it's a matter of personal preference.

2. **MAKE THE RICE FLOUR PASTE:** Once the cabbage is brined, make the rice flour paste. In a small saucepan over medium-high heat, continually whisk the sweet rice flour and 1 cup water until it reaches a boil. Keep whisking for 2 minutes until it reaches a pudding-like consistency. Remove from heat, transfer to a container and refrigerate until cool.

3. **MAKE THE MARINADE:** Combine the onion, Asian pear, ginger, garlic, chile peppers and ¼ cup water in a food processor and run until smooth, then transfer to a large bowl. Add the shrimp, sugar, rice flour paste, gochugaru, scallion greens, carrot and daikon and combine well.

4. Drain the brined cabbage, rinse each piece well in cold water and place them in a very large bowl. While wearing plastic gloves, toss the cabbage with the marinade, coating well. Transfer to clean, large glass jars or clean plastic containers with lids that fit snugly. You can cut the cabbage to fit if you want, or keep the leaves whole and pack them tightly in the jars. Affix the lids, though not too tightly, and place the jars in a cool, dark and dry space and allow to

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ferment for 1 day. Heads up: The fermentation process may cause some kimchi juice to bubble over, so place the jars in a plastic bag. When done, refrigerate for 5 to 7 days, or until the kimchi has reached your desired level of funk. It will keep up to a month in the refrigerator to enjoy eaten directly from the container, or longer for use in further cooking, like in Kimchi Jeon (*recipe not included*) and Kimchi Jjigae (*recipe not included*).

Gochujang (Spicy Fermented Pepper Paste)

Everybody has gone nuts for sriracha, but all we've gotta say is that sriracha had better watch its back for gochujang. Identified by its bright red container, gochujang (pronounced go-CHOO-jong) is a force in the Korean kitchen and used in soups, stews, sauces and barbecue marinades. It's savory, slightly funky (in the best way), a little sweet and can be hotter than the peppers grown at Satan's CSA. So pay attention to the pepper rating system on the packaging. The level 2 or 3 rating is typically our move.

Back in the day, gochujang was produced once a year, around the first day of spring. But with technological advancements and global demand, it's now pumped out of factories like ketchup. The process is relatively straightforward: meju, a cement-like block of dried and fermented soybeans, is mixed with hot pepper flakes, barley, sweet rice flour and salted water, then left out in the sun to ferment and mellow for thirty to ninety days. In Korea, where virtually all jangs are produced, gochujang is aged in large earthenware pots. When used straight, the flavor of gochujang can be a little too intense, so it's always mixed in with things like sesame oil, rice vinegar, garlic, ginger and soy sauce.

Red Chile Powder (Gochugaru)

Korean red chile powder is sold both coarsely and finely ground. The flavor is sweet and ever-so-slightly smoky, but the main function is to add heat. As you will find out, this food can be H-O-T. We're not going to say this often, but it's essential to buy gochugaru, as cayenne or crushed red pepper flakes will just not work the same. We've written all these recipes precisely for the flavor and heat level of gochugaru. Prices can range from a couple dollars to nearly twenty for the Merck-grade artisanal stuff. And watch out for the gochugaru made from finely ground seeds, which is where the dark heart of the heat lives.



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