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Korean Sloppy Joe

BY JIYEON LEE AND CODY TAYLOR

Who is the Joe behind the iconic American sandwich the sloppy joe? It's hard to say exactly, but some have pointed to restaurants in Sioux City, Iowa, and South Orange, New Jersey—with typically an unfortunate trademark-law-ignorant cook named Joe being part of the story. While the classic recipe calls for ground beef to be cooked with onions and a sweet homemade barbecue sauce, this Korean version—which comes from Jiyeon Lee and Cody Taylor of Heirloom Market BBQ and Sobban in Atlanta, Georgia—is all about the pork. The simple and delicious marinade consists of some classic Koreatown flavors: garlic, ginger, gochujang, sesame oil and soy sauce. When used in a loosemeat sandwich format, it really can be a surprising curveball to get you out of a weeknight cooking rut. It's best served with a pickle and okra kimchi, which is how they do it in the ATL.

SERVES 2 TO 4

1 pound ground pork
1-inch knob of ginger, grated
6 garlic cloves, chopped
5 tablespoons gochugang [sic] (*see below*)
1 tablespoon sesame oil
1 tablespoon sugar
1 tablespoon soy sauce
½ teaspoon black pepper
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
4 hamburger buns
1 cup diced onion
Pickles, for serving (optional)
Okra Kimchi (*recipe follows*), for serving (optional)

1. In a large bowl, mix the pork, ginger, garlic, gochujang, sesame oil, sugar, soy sauce and black pepper. Marinate 2 hours, or preferably overnight, in the refrigerator.
2. Heat a large cast-iron skillet over high heat with the vegetable oil. When shimmering-hot, sauté the diced onions for about 4 minutes, stirring constantly, or until soft. Add marinated pork and sauté, stirring, just until fully cooked through, 5 to 7 minutes. Drain any residual fat, if needed.
3. While the pork cooks, toast the buns.
4. Divide the meat and place it onto the buns. Serve, ideally with pickles and a side of Okra Kimchi.

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OKRA KIMCHI

MAKES 1 QUART, INCLUDING BRINE

1 pound okra
8 garlic cloves
1 tablespoon rice vinegar
½ cup sugar
1 cup coarse gochugaru (*see below*)
1 tablespoon onion powder
½ tablespoon black pepper
¼ cup kosher salt

1. Cut off the stems of the okra and cut the pods lengthwise.
2. Place the garlic and ¼ cup of water in a blender and blend until finely chopped. Add the vinegar, sugar, gochugaru, onion powder, black pepper, salt and 1½ cups of water. Blend until the sugar is completely dissolved.
3. In a large bowl, mix the okra with the sauce. Refrigerate for at least 2 hours. Okra kimchi lasts up to 24 hours in the refrigerator.

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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