



ANSON MILLS

Mak Kimchi

Yield

About 3½ quarts

Time

Day 1: About 1 hour of active preparation, plus at least 12 hours of brine time; Day 2: About 40 minutes of active time; Fermentation time: 4 to 5 days at room temperature

Cooking Remarks

We chose a brine rather than a dry-salt cure for our napa because the cabbage is chopped—hence the name *mak*, which means “careless”—and was eager to weep. (Traditional recipes, for *poggi kimchi*, cure the cabbage in halves or quarters—first with salt, then by spreading seasoning paste between the leaves. That’s one for another day.) The cabbage rested overnight refrigerated in the brine and emerged next morning from the liquid perfectly seasoned and delightfully crisp. But daikon, the Asian radish whose distinctive piquancy makes it favored for kimchi, is another story. The Japanese variety, which is, in all probability, what you’ll be buying, are, in particular, bursting with liquid. (Korean daikon are shorter and stouter with green shoulders. They’re also quite difficult to find unless you live in the vicinity of a Korean grocer.) Many mak kimchi recipes julienne the daikon to help it keep pace with the cabbage in the brine. We didn’t like how the misbegotten cuts worked together so we went to quarter-rounds of daikon. We then salt-cured it before adding it to the drained brined cabbage. This circumvented a torrent of moisture running into the seasoned kimchi and diluting the seasoning.

Natural fermentation requires organic produce and pure sea salt. The napa should look frilly and pale green—and feel firm. The daikon must not be flaccid. We used fresh uncured garlic from the farmers’ market in one of our batches and it was sweet and mellow. Very nice. If you have regular supermarket garlic (which is cured) and if the cloves contain green germs or sprouts, make sure to remove them before mincing, as the germs taste bitter and hot.

Many recipes suggest kicking off fermentation with a touch of sugar. But since *we’re* trying to kick sugar, we chose grated green apple instead. We found coarse organic *gochugaru*, dried Korean red pepper that broadcasts the aroma, flavor, and heat we associate with kimchi, and a good-quality fish sauce (Red Boat brand, though we understand that Three Crabs is the brand of choice for many Korean cooks). All of these items are available from Amazon. If you’re lucky and live in Honolulu, Los Angeles, New York, or Bergen County, New Jersey, you’ll have no problem tracking down Korean salted shrimp called *saeujeot*. This funky, briny umami-ful ingredient is packed in glass or plastic jars and sold in the refrigerator section of Korean markets. Many of you, however, *will* be able to track down fresh oysters, which, we discovered, create their own kind of magic in a kimchi bath. But there is no shame in simple fish sauce alone. In the past, kimchi was cured with chestnuts. Today, many Koreans enjoy putting chopped walnuts into the mix. We loved that addition, too.

It bears noting that acidity and spiciness in kimchi are very much a matter of personal preference. Asian populations, in particular, prefer hotter, redder kimchi. A number of non-Asian friends of mine expressed “fear of kimchi” based less on its sourness than on the degree of heat—i.e., *gochugaru*—it frequently expresses. As evidenced by our photo, the batch of kimchi represented here is less than incendiary. It carries a pleasing dust-up of heat, but it won’t burn you. We provide a range for the *gochugaru* in the recipe below.

There is much discussion about fermentation times. We left some kimchi batches at room temperature for four days, others for seven. How long to ferment will depend on the temperature of your room and on your own personal preference. The most important takeaway here is that the vegetables must be submerged in the liquid throughout. Unseal the crock and taste the kimchi every day, pressing down on the vegetables with a clean spoon or tongs to pull the liquid up to cover the vegetables, if necessary. Reseal the jar and wait. It will go from a tasty raw slaw with Korean accents to something far more complex. When it’s sour enough to suit you, chill it down well and serve with abandon.

If you’re looking for a 1-gallon fermentation vessel for your kimchi, consider a hand-thrown glazed ceramic crock with a water-moat seal and weights made by Mudslide Stoneware or a glass jar with an exterior airlock and round glass weight (sold separately from the jar) from Pickl-It.

Equipment Mise en Place

For this recipe, you will need a 3-gallon bowl, pot, or other foodsafe container; a plate for weighting the cabbage in the brine; a medium bowl; a colander and an extra-large colander; a heavy-bottomed small saucepan; a whisk; rubber gloves; a pair of tongs; a 1-gallon fermentation crock or jar with a water seal or airlock; a baking dish or pie plate; a kitchen towel to wrap the vessel if it is clear; and clean glass jars if you will be storing the kimchi in smaller portions. A digital kitchen scale would be very helpful.

Ingredients

for the vegetables

5 quarts filtered or spring water
2/3 cup (6 ounces) plus 2 teaspoons fine sea salt
2 (4- to 4½-pound) heads napa cabbage
1 pound daikon radish

for the seasoning paste

2 tablespoons (0.6 ounces) Anson Mills Carolina Gold Rice Flour
2/3 cup (5.4 ounces) spring or filtered water
½ to 2/3 cup (2 to 2.6 ounces) Korean red pepper flakes (*gochugaru*)
2 tablespoons (0.8 ounces) minced garlic
1 Granny Smith apple, peeled, cored, and grated on the large holes of box grater (3 ounces, ½ cup)
3 tablespoons (1.75 ounces) drained Korean salted shrimp (*saeujeot*), finely chopped, or 1 to 1½ dozen (depending on their size) freshly shucked oysters (about 3 ounces), coarsely chopped

1/4 cup (2 ounces) good-quality fish sauce
1/2 cup (2 ounces) finely chopped walnuts
2 bunches scallions
Anson Mills Benne Seeds, toasted, for garnish (optional)

Directions

1. Prepare the vegetables: Pour the water into a 3-gallon bowl, pot, or other foodsafe container. Add the 2/3 cup (6 ounces) of salt and stir to dissolve. Remove and discard the wilted and damaged outer leaves from each head of cabbage. Cut each cabbage in half lengthwise, and then cut each half lengthwise into thirds. Trim and discard the base and tip from each section, and then chop the cabbage crosswise into 2-inch pieces; you should have about 5 pounds of trimmed cabbage. Turn the cabbage into the brine, pressing down to submerge it, and weight it with a plate that fits inside the container. Refrigerate overnight.

2. The following morning, peel and trim the daikon. Cut it in half horizontally, cut each half lengthwise into quarters, and then slice each piece into 1/8-inch-thick fan shapes. Toss the slices into a medium bowl, sprinkle with the 2 teaspoons salt, and toss well. Let stand at room temperature, tossing occasionally, until the daikon has disgorged quite a bit of liquid, about 2 hours. Meanwhile, set an extra-large colander in the sink. Pour the brined cabbage into the colander and shake the colander vigorously to drain off as much water as possible. Set the colander aside and allow the cabbage to continue to drain while you prepare the seasoning paste.

3. Make the seasoning paste: In a heavy-bottomed small saucepan, combine the rice flour and water and cook over medium heat until the mixture is smooth, shiny, and translucent and small bubbles bloop about the edges, about 1 minute. Remove from the heat and let cool slightly. To the rice flour paste, add the red pepper flakes, garlic, grated apple, salted shrimp or chopped oysters, fish sauce, and walnuts. Whisk well.

4. Return the drained cabbage to the 3-gallon pot or bowl (the cabbage will still be rather wet, but this is fine). Drain the daikon in the colander, rinse it well under cool running water, dry with paper towels, and add it to the cabbage. Trim and coarsely chop the scallions—you should have about 2 cups—and toss them into the bowl. Pull on a pair of rubber gloves. Pour the seasoning paste onto the vegetables and mix well with your hands to combine, massaging the paste into the cabbage. Using clean tongs, pack the mixture into a clean 1-gallon fermentation crock or jar with a water seal or airlock; push down on the vegetables as you go to remove oxygen from their environment. Once all of the vegetables are packed in, about 2 inches of headspace should remain at the top of the vessel. Cover and seal with water or the airlock. Set the crock in a baking dish or pie plate to catch any liquid, in case overflow occurs during fermentation. If your vessel is clear glass, wrap a kitchen towel around it to shield the vegetables from direct sunlight. Allow to ferment at room temperature; once or twice a day, open the jar and use a clean spoon or spatula to press down on the kimchi to remove air pockets and to make sure that the vegetables are fully submerged in the liquid. Taste the kimchi every day or two during fermentation; when the flavors are complex and melded and the vegetables have developed a pleasing sour piquancy—after 4 or 5 days—the kimchi is ready.

5. If your fermentation vessel has a secure-fitting lid for storage, the kimchi can be refrigerated directly in the vessel. If not, use tongs to transfer the kimchi to clean glass jars. Distribute the liquid among the jars, cover tightly, and refrigerate. The flavors will continue to develop over the next days, but slowly; the kimchi will gradually turn fizzier and tangier. Expect it to keep for up to 3 months in the refrigerator. Serve very chilled, sprinkled with toasted benne seeds (if desired).