

Kimchi Protocols & Where to get the Ingredients

Step 1: Pick the right ingredients (at the right time)

There are hundreds of types of kimchi, made with everything from cucumbers to perilla leaves. The guidance below focuses on the baechu, which is primarily made of Wongbok cabbage leaves but can incorporate smaller amounts of julienned mu for texture. It's best to make this in mid-autumn to winter when cabbage and radishes are at their peak.

What to look for:

- **Cabbage:** When picking a cabbage, look for one where the tips of the leaves are bright green; avoid cabbages that are too pale or white. The leaves should be tight, firm, and thin, not loose, soft, and floppy. When you cut into it, it should have a bright yellow colour inside. A sturdy cabbage means the leaves will stay crunchy after they ferment.
- **Radish:** Choose a big, fat radish, white and yellow toward the bottom and turning bright green toward the stem and leaves. The process of picking a radish is similar to how you choose a watermelon — it should feel heavier than other radishes its size, which indicates serious water content inside. If it's light, it'll be too old and dried out.
- **Gochugaru:** Gochugaru is a ground Korean hot pepper, the key to the flavour and gentle heat of kimchi. Produced in South Korea, gochugaru is the best choice for our recipe, because of the way they sun-dry their chilies, which makes for a rounder, more nuanced flavour.

Step 2: Time to brine

Salting the cabbage is key to both preserving and seasoning the kimchi. How long you let it sit in its saltwater brine, depends on where you live and the salinity of the water. If you're living in a warm environment, keep it in the water closer to six or seven hours; if you're in a chilly kitchen, it can be more like eight or nine. You'll know when it's ready, when the leaves look slightly wilted. The amount of salt also varies depending on how much cabbage you're using, use as little salt as you can while also allowing for safe fermentation — that's about 3 percent salt to water

weight, similar to ocean water. Korean coarse sea salt is best, but a plain, un-iodised sea salt or fine himalayan salt works in a pinch. After you've added your salt to the cabbage, trim, thinly slice, and wash your radish before adding to the rest of the vegetables.

Step 3: Make your marinade

While your ingredients are brining, mix up your marinade. Exact amounts and ratios are based on personal preference, but there are usually a few crucial components to each formula:

- **First, something to loosen everything up:** Instead of using plain water for a kimchi marinade, use dashi or vegetable broth for extra depth, as I showed you in the workshop.
- **Whip up a rice slurry:** Then, combine your dashi and rice flour and bring both to a boil; the slurry should end up decently thick. This will help the marinade cling to the cabbage. A Kimchi marinade shouldn't be *too* pasty; set aside some extra broth to adjust the consistency once you're finished then add the gochugaru to the warm rice slurry, which helps it bloom.
- **Blend some ginger and alliums:** Garlic and scallions are the primary aromatics in a lot of Korean cooking (or cooking anywhere in the world), including kimchi. Thinly slice some ginger pieces, peel *a lot* of garlic and slice up de-seeded chilies — all of these will go in a blender. Now is also a good time to slice up some scallions, which will go in your kimchi at the very end.
- **Put in something sweet:** Grated Asian pear or apple bring just a touch of sweetness to the kimchi, but some people add straight-up sugar. Others contribute all three —think about how sweet you'd like your kimchi to be. Factor in the sweetness of your cabbage and radish — if they're peak season, that might contribute a lot of sweetness, which makes the extra sugar less necessary. I usually add apple to the mixer, but it is also nice to finely slice and incorporate into into the main vegetable mix.
- **Add something fishy:** Fish products, like fermented salted shrimp or fish sauce, provide that signature kimchi funk. You can experiment with using a combination of fish sauces, and adjust to taste.

Add your pear or apple, garlic, and ginger to a blender or food processor with a splash of the dashi or broth. In a separate bowl, mix up the slurry, fish sauce, and gochugaru. Combine the two liquids, and boom — you have a marinade. You’re looking for a saucy, smooth texture that’s not too thin. Taste and adjust ratios as you see fit. If it’s too fishy, add a little more of the pear, or vice versa. Remember, once the mixture has aged, the tanginess will increase, but the fishiness will mellow.

Finishing the kimchi

Step 4. Rinse and combine

Before you mix the marinade and vegetables, you need to rinse the salt from the cabbage thoroughly. Rinse it twice, then let as much of the water drain as possible. No need to rinse your radishes; they’re ready as soon as they’re drained. Once the cabbage and radishes are ready, they should go into a marinade. Other things to add, for those so inclined are scallions, mustard leaves, green onions, or Korean chives known as buchu.

Step 5: Wait

If you’re into salty, less tangy fresh kimchi, you can go ahead and dig in, but fans of funky-acidic fermented kimchi should stuff the cabbage in a fermenting jar. They let gas escape without letting in dangerous bacteria. Seal it and put it in a dark and shady place. A kimchi fridge is a good choice for hardcore kimchi fans; otherwise, a cool corner of your kitchen will do just fine.

The final fermentation time depends on the temperature outside and how funky you want to ferment your kimchi — in warmer days, the fermentation kicks in at 12 to 24 hours; in cooler weather, it can take two to three days. You can tell it’s adequately fermented when you see little bubbles travelling up the sides of the jar. From there, it’ll continue to slowly (and safely) ferment in the fridge.

Step 6: Put it in, on, and over, everything

Jal meokkesseumnida! (In other words, you’re about to eat well.)

Where to get your ingredients

Fresh Vegetables

EVERYTHING you get must be as fresh and organic as you can afford. I usually purchase my vegetables at Jadan (in Mt Roskill) or at smaller chinese grocers that have a quick turnaround.

Salt

Korean Flakey salt - You can get this from all korean H-Mart stores and most Chinese stores (that have a korean section)

Fine Himalayan Salt - This is available at most supermarkets

Seaweed, dried mushroom, Salted Shrimp (from the freezer) and Chinese Chives

All korean H-Mart, and most chinese stores will have these ingredients.