

Poggi Kimchi (Whole Napa Cabbage Kimchi)

Ingredients

1 head napa cabbage (approximately 5 lbs.)
½ cup coarse salt (usually sea salt but kosher is fine too)
water to cover

2 oz. Korean red mustard leaves, cut into 2-inch lengths
1 bunch Korean chives (buchu), cut into 2-inch lengths
1 bunch Korean watercress (minari or water dropwort), cut into 2-inch lengths
2 scallions, roots trimmed and cut into 2-inch lengths
1 Korean radish, julienned
2 tablespoons fish sauce
¼ cup salted baby shrimp (saewoo juht), ground in mortar or food processor
1-inch piece of fresh ginger, ground in mortar or food processor (about 1 tablespoon)
¼ cup (or one head) garlic, ground in mortar or food processor
½ onion, ground in mortar or food processor
¾ cup Korean red pepper flakes (less if you want the kimchi less spicy)

Preparing the cabbage:

Remove any withered outer leaves and trim the root end. Cut through the root end about a quarter of the way up. With your hands, rip the cabbage in half the rest of the way. Repeat with each half so that you have four quarters. Rinse cabbage under running water. Put the cabbage in a large bowl and sprinkle the coarse salt evenly over the leaves. Make sure that some salt gets in between the larger, thicker leaves. Pour water over the cabbage, enough to cover. You can place a large heavy object over the cabbages, if you desire. Leave cabbage to soak at least six hours or overnight. After soaking, drain the cabbage and taste a leaf. If it is too salty, rinse under running water and let sit in a colander to drain.

Making the seasoning paste:

While the cabbage is soaking, you can prepare the other ingredients. Wash, trim and cut all the vegetables and place in a large bowl. Then, grind the shrimp, ginger, garlic and onion (separately or together depending on the size of your mortar or food processor). Mix the ground ingredients with the salt, fish sauce and red pepper flakes. (At this point you probably want to put on some kitchen gloves to avoid staining your hands. Korean housewives use the very thick red rubber gloves that go up to your elbow.) Add this paste/mixture to the cut vegetables and mix together. If the mixture seems too dry, add one or two tablespoons of water.

Note: For vegan kimchi, omit the fish sauce and salted shrimp and add 4 teaspoons salt to the seasoning mixture.

Putting the cabbage and seasoning together:

In a large bowl, take one of the cabbage quarters and spread the seasoning paste between each layer of leaves, starting from the outermost leaf and working inward. Take care to leave every bit of cabbage red including the outside. Repeat for all the cabbage sections.

“Putting down” your kimchi:

Put all of the cabbage sections in a clean crock, glass jar or stainless steel container. Position the cabbage sections with the cut sides down and folded over into neat packages, depending on the size of your container. If there is any seasoning paste left, put this on top of the cabbage in the container. Push the cabbage down into your container to reduce air bubbles and to encourage the release of liquid from the vegetables. Leave at least two inches of head space at the top of the container to avoid overflow when the kimchi starts fermenting. Cover the container loosely with plastic wrap or the lid of the container.

Poggi kimchi can be eaten the same day it is made, but the flavor will develop and change over time. Leave the kimchi out for 24 hours (longer if the weather is cold and the fermentation has not developed or if you want your kimchi “ripe” right away) and then put the kimchi in the refrigerator. Once in the fridge, you can close the lid tightly as the initial fermentation will slow down.

Serving and storing your kimchi:

To serve poggi kimchi, take out a cabbage section and cut it into bite-sized pieces, making sure to cut off and discard the root end. (You probably want to use your kimchi gloves for this.) Kitchen scissors are a very easy way to cut up your kimchi. Serve with rice, soup and banchan (side dishes) or invent your own kimchi dishes.

Kimchi can be kept for weeks in the refrigerator. During this time, the flavors will continue to develop, and the kimchi will get increasingly sour and sometimes even effervescent. If it gets too sour for your taste, you can cut it up and make a kimchi stew, kimchi pancakes or kimchi fried rice with it. It is only “bad” when you see mold starting to grow on it.