

# FLAVOR BLAST

MASTER CLASS

Easy to make and good for you, kimchi can transform everyday cooking. *By Ivy Manning*

**FUNKY, FERMENTED,** and addictively spicy, kimchi is showing up everywhere from food trucks to fine dining. Why so popular? Partly because Americans crave fiery flavors these days (Sriracha seems ubiquitous). But we're also flocking to kimchi for its health benefits—it has the same good-for-you probiotic bacteria found in yogurt—and its incredible adaptability in the kitchen.

“Kimchi tastes great with lots of things, not just Korean food,” says Matt Choi, cofounder of Choi’s Kimchi, in Portland. “Customers tell us they’re putting it in tacos and on sandwiches, and even in salsa.”

Matt and his mother, Chong Choi, started selling kimchi made with her mother’s recipe at the Portland State University farmers’ market in 2011; now they supply restaurants and markets across the Northwest. Last January, their kimchi nabbed a national first-prize medal at The Good Food Awards, and they’re nominated again this year.

Here and at [sunset.com/kimchivideo](http://sunset.com/kimchivideo), Chong shares her process. It’s easier than you’d think—and can be as hot (or not) as you like.



Left: Chong Choi, with son Matt Choi, mixes up a batch of prize-winning napa cabbage kimchi at home. Above: The fresh kimchi.

## The keys to kimchi



In Korea, kimchi comes in dozens of types, from cabbage to green onion to daikon radish to cucumber; some are not hot at all. The Chois’ spicy napa cabbage version has several ingredients, but the following are the most crucial.

**GOCHUGARU** The fruity, smoky flavor of this ground spice, made from sun-dried red chiles (in the red package at left), is vital for authentic-tasting kimchi; that said, you can use other ground chiles in a pinch and the kimchi will still be delicious. Find *gochugaru* (not to be confused with the Korean chile paste called *gochu-*

*jang*) at Asian markets and online.

**NAPA CABBAGE** “Look for cabbages that are green on the outside and yellow on the inside; these have more flavor than fat white ones,” Chong says. Farmers’ markets and Asian stores usually have the best selection.

**DAIKON RADISH** Either the wide Korean daikon or the slender all-white Japanese daikon works fine.

**SEA SALT** The Chois favor coarse Korean sea salt. “We buy the highest quality; cheap salts have a bitter aftertaste,” Chong says. You can use any good-quality coarse sea salt.

# CHOI'S NAPA CABBAGE KIMCHI

**MAKES ABOUT 2 PINTS  
30 MINUTES, PLUS 6 HOURS FOR SALTING  
AND 2 TO 7 DAYS TO FERMENT**

This fiery kimchi closely resembles the award-winning product the Chois sell at their Portland Farmers Market stand and at grocery stores in the Portland area. “For the best and most authentic flavor, you must use *gochugaru* in kimchi,” Chong advises. However, you can make a delicious kimchi with a combination of ground mild New Mexico chiles and hotter arbol or Thai chiles.

- 1 small head napa cabbage (2 lbs.)
- 4 oz. daikon radish (center section), peeled and sliced ¼ in. thick, then cut into 1-in. pieces (¾ cup)
- ¼ cup coarse sea salt
- ¼ Asian pear
- ¼ cup ground Korean chile (*gochugaru*)\*
- 2 tbsp. minced yellow onion
- 5 medium garlic cloves, minced
- ½ tsp. minced fresh ginger
- 1½ tsp. Thai or Vietnamese fish sauce
- ½ tsp. sugar
- 1 green onion, white end halved lengthwise, then entire onion cut into 1½-in. lengths

1. Quarter cabbage lengthwise. Cut out and discard core at base of each quarter, then slice cabbage crosswise into 2½-in. pieces. Put cabbage in a large bowl, cover with water, and let sit for a minute.
2. Drain cabbage and return to bowl. Add the daikon radish, sprinkle with salt, and toss with your hands to thoroughly coat.
3. Press down on vegetables to compact them; let sit at room temperature for 20 minutes. Stir to redistribute the salt and let vegetables sit, uncovered at room temperature 5 to 6 hours (no need to stir again).
4. Put vegetables in a large bowl of cold water and swish to rinse, then drain and repeat until it is as salty you like. **“I change the water up to three times, tasting as I go to gauge saltiness. The thickest part of the cabbage won’t taste salty**

**TIP**  
*“Soaking coats the leaves with water, so when you add salt, it becomes a clingy brine.”*



5. After the final draining, gently squeeze out most of the liquid and transfer vegetables to a large, clean, dry bowl. Peel, halve, and core the Asian pear. **“The pear adds natural sweetness and is refreshing to the palate.”** Cut into ¼-in.-thick slices, then into 1-in.-wide pieces (you should have about ¾ cup). Add pear to bowl with all remaining ingredients except the green onion. Mix thoroughly, then gently mix in the green onion.

6. Pack kimchi into two clean 1-pint jars, leaving 1½ inches of headspace below the rim. Push vegetables down firmly into the jars so the liquid within the jars rises.
7. Seal jars with a tight-fitting lid and let sit on a rimmed baking sheet at room temperature, away from direct sunlight. Fermentation time varies, but at warm room temperature it should take 2 to 3 days; if it’s cool, up to 1 week. Sample the kimchi regularly (it may fizz a little when you open the jar, a sign that the fermentation is working). Open jars over the sink in case they drip. **“As the kimchi ferments, more liquid will come out of the**



**vegetables. Check the jars every day and push down on the kimchi to cause the juices to come up. This ferments the topmost part of the jar.”** When the kimchi is nicely tangy, it’s ready to eat. It will keep, refrigerated, for up to three months.

*\*As a substitute for gochugaru, coarsely grind 8 seeded dried New Mexico chiles with 5 or 6 seeded dried arbol or Thai chiles in a clean coffee grinder; add more hot chiles to make it spicier if you like.*

XPER ¼-CUP SERVING 000 Cal., 00% (00 Cal.) from fat; 00 g protein; 000 g fat (000 g sat.); 000 g carbo (000 g fiber); 000 mg sodium; 00 mg chol. X

**“Mix the green onion in at the end, so it doesn’t bruise and looks nice.”**

**TIP**

## 10 ways with kimchi



**1. SCHMEAR** Blend chopped kimchi with cream cheese and a little sour cream. Excellent on a toasted bagel.

**2. TACOS** Take a tip from the fusion taco trucks and pair grilled pork or steak with kimchi instead of lettuce in tacos.

**3. SOUP** Mix chopped kimchi with soft tofu, miso, chicken broth, and green onions. “It’s a traditional way to use up old, sour kimchi,” says Matt.

**4. SANDWICH** Sub chopped kimchi for sauerkraut in a reuben.

**5. FRIED RICE** Stir-fry bacon with kimchi, cold leftover rice, sesame oil, and soy sauce; top it off with a fried egg.

**6. BLOODY MARY BLEND** Add kimchi and its juices to tomato juice and a shot of pepper vodka.

**7. BURGERS** Mix kimchi into beef or pork patties before grilling, then top with more kimchi afterward.

**8. SALSA** Mix diced avocados and mangos with chopped kimchi. Serve with grilled fish.

**9. QUESADILLAS** Combine crisp pork belly or bacon with cheddar and chopped kimchi.

**10. HOT DOGS** Top with kimchi and mustard. 🍔