

JAPCHAE

Japchae is a go-to dish for holidays and special occasions, like having people over for dinner. Directions for cooking are usually ambiguous: “Boil until well and done” and “plenty of soy sauce and some sesame oil.” The less you use tools and more intuitive you are, the better. The only “rule” is that you can’t cook the vegetables together, because each cooks at a different rate.

This japchae is made using vegan ingredients, but you can also add slices of stir fried meat and/or egg. It also includes the most traditional vegetables, but you could also add your favorite veggies. The rule of thumb with Korean food is to be mindful of the colors represented; red bell peppers would be a nice addition with its vibrant hue.



INGREDIENTS

12 oz sweet potato noodles (may be called vermicelli or glass noodles; ingredients should be just sweet potato and water)
5 tbsp soy sauce
2 tbsp sugar
1 tbsp sesame oil

olive oil
1 medium carrot, julienned
1 bunch spinach, washed, drained, and trimmed
8 oz fresh mushrooms, sliced
1 onion, sliced
toasted sesame seeds for garnish

DIRECTIONS

In a steamer, steam the spinach for about 1 minute or until vivid green. Remove from steamer and rinse immediately in cold water. Drain and gently squeeze out all the water from spinach. Set aside.

In a wok or a large saute pan, heat 1 tbsp olive oil over medium heat. Add onion and cook, stirring occasionally, for 7 minutes, or until translucent and soft. Remove from pan and set aside.

In the same pan, add about a tsp of oil and saute carrots for 2-3 minutes until soft and cooked through. (If sticking, just splash a tablespoon of water to cook with steam). Remove from pan and set aside.

In the same pan, add oil if needed and cook mushrooms for 2 minutes until cooked. Turn off the heat.

Bring water to boil in a large pot, then add noodles and cook 5 minutes. Drain, then rinse in cold water. Let the noodles continue to drain while you prepare the sauce.

In a small bowl, mix the soy sauce, sesame oil, and sugar. Add the vegetables and noodles back to the pan and pour the soy sauce mixture over the noodles. Heat over medium for 3-5 minutes, stirring to combine. Remove from heat and garnish with toasted sesame seeds.

HOTTEOK

Hotteok (Korean Sweet Pancakes) is a popular Korean street food made from a simple yeast dough with a sweet syrupy filling made with brown sugar, cinnamon and walnuts. It makes a tasty snack or dessert, and could even be enjoyed at breakfast!

INGREDIENTS

1 cup lukewarm water
2 Tablespoons sugar
2 teaspoons active dry yeast
1 Tablespoon vegetable oil
½ teaspoon salt
2 cups all-purpose flour

Filling
½ cup brown sugar
4 T chopped walnuts
1 teaspoon cinnamon



DIRECTIONS

In a large mixing bowl or the bowl of a stand mixer, stir together the lukewarm water, sugar, yeast, oil and salt. Let the yeast proof for about 5 minutes until it starts to get foamy.

Add the flour to the yeast mixture and knead with the mixer until smooth. This could also be done by hand or with a rubber spatula.

Cover dough tightly with plastic wrap and allow it to rise for 1 hour at room temperature until the dough has doubled in size.

Coat your hand lightly in cooking spray and punch down the dough to remove gas bubbles, then cover again and let the dough rise another 20 minutes. During the last rise, mix together the filling ingredients in a small bowl.

When the dough is ready, turn out onto a floured surface and coat your hands with flour. Divide into 8 equal-sized pieces and shape into balls.

Working with one dough ball at a time, flatten it out and mound about a tablespoon of the filling in the center. Then pinch the edges of the disc together up around the filling, enclosing it completely in the center of the ball of dough as seen in the pictures. Repeat with the remaining balls of dough and filling. You may need to re-flour your hands between dough balls if the dough starts sticking too much.

Heat a large pan over medium heat. When hot, add a little oil (about 2 tablespoons) to the pan and let that heat up as well. When the oil is hot, place a dough ball in it, with the sealed area down and cook until lightly golden brown on the bottom (just about 30 seconds), then flip. Using a large, flat spatula, press down on the hotteok to flatten it into a wide disc and cook until the bottom is golden brown.

Flip the hotteok one last time and reduce the heat to low. Cover the pan with a lid and cook for another minute or so, just until the bottom is completely golden brown and the filling inside is melted and syrupy.

You can cook more than one hotteok at a time if your pan is large enough. Just make sure to leave enough space between each dough ball so that it can be pressed flat into a disc. I can do three at a time in my largest cast-iron pan.