

What is Kimchi?

Story By: Andrew Frinkle

Kimchi is the national food of South Korea. It is a bit of a mystery to people who don't live in the area or don't eat a lot of international foods, though. So what exactly is this food?

Kimchi is basically pickled vegetables. Already, I'm imagining noses turning up. Don't give up yet! I'm sure you have pickles and relish from time to time. This is a bit different. In fact, it's more like sauerkraut, if you know what that is. It is a German pickled cabbage in vinegar. You might have had it on a hot dog or a sausage before. It's tangy and bitter, but good.

Now, take that and make it spicy! Lots of people like spicy food. Some kimchi is very spicy, some is very mild, and some is not spicy at all. The classic cabbage kimchi that everyone seems to think of as "real kimchi" is usually somewhat spicy. It is cabbage that has been soaked in salt, hot pepper flakes, ground garlic, ground ginger, maybe some fish sauce, and a few other things like chopped radishes and some green onions perhaps. It is savory, sweet, spicy, and salty all at once. It's not a meal – it's a side dish.

Kimchi is a way of life, really. Imagine long ago when there were no refrigerators. People everywhere used to dry or smoke meats so they could eat in the winter, but they still needed vegetables, right? Salt was a man's best friend. They salted and canned vegetables, putting them in barrels or jars to keep the vegetables from rotting. Instead of just plain salt, Korean people started adding other seasonings to their vegetables, especially veggies like cabbages, radishes, onions, cucumbers, and that sort. Now, they could eat them all winter long and even in the spring before the new crops came in. Families still get together in the fall to make pots of kimchi for the winter, even if they now have special kimchi refrigerators to keep their kimchi fresh longer.

So, if you ever go to a Korean restaurant, you might order a rice dish, and find a dish of cabbage kimchi next to it. You might see some chopped radishes in sweet and spicy sauce. You might find some pickled onions and garlic, or even some sliced cucumbers pickled in a way that is similar to what we know. These are kimchi, and there are dozens of varieties. They even have kimchi museums!

Now you know a little about Kimchi, the national food of Korea. Go try some! You might even find some on a shelf in a store near you. Remember, it's a side dish, just like the coleslaw next to your fried chicken or the mashed potatoes next to your steak.



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Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. What country is Kimchi from?
 - A. Korea
 - B. Japan
 - C. China
 - D. Mongolia

2. Kimchi is basically a kind of what?
 - A. sauce
 - B. pickled vegetable
 - C. coleslaw
 - D. dessert

3. What is different about Kimchi when compared to the pickles we eat?
 - A. It's usually spicier.
 - B. It's made from meat.
 - C. It's only eaten on one day of the year.
 - D. It's fresh instead of canned or put in jars.

4. TRUE OR FALSE: Kimchi is a side dish, not a main meal food?
 - A. TRUE
 - B. FALSE

5. What ingredient might you NOT find in kimchi?
 - A. garlic
 - B. radishes
 - C. salt
 - D. mustard

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