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FOOD & DRINK | GAMECHANGER

Awesome Sauce: Why Gochujang Is a Gamechanger

The lipsmacking Korean chili paste gochujang provides measured heat and savory depth in dishes where you haven't yet thought to use it



Gochujang hot pepper paste PHOTO: JOSHUA SCOTT FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Jane Black

Updated Jan. 18, 2017 12:50 p.m. ET

LONG BEFORE IT seemed every tasty food was hyperbolically labeled “crack,” chef Sohui Kim started spreading her morning biscuits with a substance it’s hard to say no to: butter mixed with honey and a big dollop of gochujang, aka Korean chili paste.

WAYS TO USE IT

- Compound Butter Mix butter with equal parts honey and gochujang. Great on biscuits or under the skin of a roast chicken.
- Spicy Mayo Mix mayonnaise and gochujang at a ratio of about 4 to 1. The sauce gives both beef and tuna burgers a kick.
- Glaze for Grilled Vegetables Finely chop equal parts garlic and ginger. Add gochujang, soy sauce and sesame oil, and brush on vegetables before grilling. Garnish with sesame seeds.

The recipe, recently published in “The Good

Fork Cookbook” by Ms. Kim and co-author Rachel Wharton, was a happy discovery for me—proof that gochujang could be used in all kinds of ways, beyond Korean dishes such as bibimbap. “Think of it like mustard,” Ms. Kim said. “It holds salad dressings together. You can slather it on steak or use it in marinades.”

Gochujang is traditionally made from dried red chilies, glutinous rice, fermented soybeans and salt, though these days most producers add a little sugar too. The luscious spread is spicy but not overwhelmingly so, and subtly sweet, with the deep umami flavor of fermentation. Thicker

and richer than Sriracha, gochujang is where that hot sauce was 10 years ago: going mainstream in a big way.

Ms. Kim, who was born in Korea and lived there until she was 10, remembers her grandmother mixing up a big batch of gochujang each year, stirring the ingredients in an earthen jar and letting it ferment outdoors; she hopes to soon start making her own for her two Brooklyn restaurants, the Good Fork and Insa. The rest of us can choose from dozens of brands: CJ Haechandle, Wang and Chung Jung One are relatively easy to find online or in Asian markets. The key: Choose one without excessive corn syrup or added MSG.

With Ms. Kim's encouragement, I made a version of her Korean bouillabaisse by sautéing kimchi with gochujang, soy sauce and fish sauce, then adding stock and a mix of shrimp, scallops and mussels. The gochujang added flavor and served as a thickener. Above, a few other piquant possibilities.

Where to Buy Asian grocery stores carry many different brands, as well as sauces based on the paste, such as Gochujang Spicy Miso Sauce by Chung Jung One. Mother-in-Law's, known for its kimchi, also makes gochujang and gochujang sauces (*\$20 for two 10-ounce jars, milkimchi.com*).

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