

# [Brandywine Table]

## Ka'Chi Truck

### KOREAN WITH A TWIST

Laura Muzzi Brennan

**M**AY BRINGS MANY FAMILIAR WAYS TO DINE al fresco: on restaurant patios, on picnic blankets, on lounge chairs by the pool. But if you've never dined in line, you're missing out.

Our region is home to hundreds of food trucks offering tastes from around the globe. Start talking to groupies at any food festival, and you'll find people who follow their favorite trucks like Deadheads once "toured" with Jerry Garcia.

This made choosing our featured truck a difficult task. But after much deliberation—and a curiosity about Korean food piqued by hours watching the Olympics in PyeongChang—we bring you **Ka'Chi Truck** where Korean food is served with a twist.

Sung-Yoon Kang opened Ka'Chi (meaning "together") in 2012 with help from wife Dawn. Both have restaurants in their blood. Dawn's family owned The Dansbury Depot in East Stroudsburg, PA for years.

Before Kang, a Korean native, came to the U.S. in the early 1990s, he lived in Saudi Arabia where his dad opened a restaurant. He also learned his craft at home in his mother's kitchen. He cites her alongside famous professional chefs Roy Choi and Edward Lee as important influences.

When Ka'Chi first got rolling, its fried kimchi (fermented cabbage) rice balls and daeji bulgogi (spicy pork) tacos made a name for themselves on the West Chester University lunchtime food truck scene. These dishes as well as "simplified" bibimbap (rice bowls with choice of protein, greens and red cabbage slaw) remain popular even as Ka'Chi has rolled on from the University.

Nowadays, Kang does about 80 events every year from spring through early winter including the Phoenixville and Chester County



food festivals, Chaddsford Winery Food Competition and Swarthmore Co-Op Truck-a-Thon. He also sets up shop at local breweries (Bluebird Distilling, East Branch Brewing and Locust Lane Craft Brewery) as well as catering weddings and other private events.

No matter the venue, his Korean BBQ tacos sell like crazy. Topped with a choice of sauces—Ka'Chi sauce (spicy mayo), gochujang (hot pepper paste) or pineapple habanero sauce, they represent truck cuisine at its best.

While Kang puts his own spin on dishes (kimcheese fries, anyone?), he gives me a crash course in Korean food basics. Like any cuisine, Korean food varies regionally, but in general, dishes are medium spicy with heat that builds slowly rather than assaulting your tongue at first bite. Rice and kimchi are at the heart of most meals with no distinctions drawn between "breakfast" and "dinner" foods. Vegetable side dishes, called banchan, are essential to Korean cuisine as are soups and stews.

As spring slips into summer, line up at Ka'Chi Truck or any one of our area's stellar mobile food courts. You'll discover new cuisines and bond with fellow foodies all while taking in fresh air and sunshine.

Grilled Chicken Skewers with pickled veggies and slaw



Ka'Chi offers a variety of sauces, from spicy hot to sweet.



Fried Kimchi Rice Balls



## Bulgogi

*This sweet, soy marinated beef is versatile: put it into tacos, roll it in lettuce wraps or serve it over rice. Recipe courtesy of Chef Sung-Yoon Kang.*



- 1/2 C. soy sauce
- 1/4 C. water
- 3-4 Tb. brown sugar
- 3-4 Tb. minced garlic
- 1 Tb. sesame oil
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper
- 1 1/2-2 lbs. thinly sliced sirloin or ribeye
- 1/2 onion thinly sliced, optional
- 1 scallion, cut into 1" strips, optional

Whisk together soy sauce, water, brown sugar, garlic, sesame oil and pepper in a large bowl. Add beef, onion and scallion. Mix thoroughly.

Cover and refrigerate for 1/2 hour or better yet, overnight.

Cook bulgogi on a grill or in a pan on the stove for 2-3 minutes. If you do cook in a pan, crank up the heat to get some caramelization. If not, the bulgogi will still taste great but will have a lot of juice which you can pour over rice and accompany with toasted seaweed.

Makes 4 servings.

---

## Spicy Gochujang Cucumbers

*These cucumbers are a traditional side dish (banchan). Gochujang is Korean red pepper paste made with brown rice, fermented soybeans and red pepper powder. Even though sriracha is easier to find in a typical grocery store and sometimes can be substituted for gochujang, this recipe works best with gochujang's deeper flavor and thicker consistency. Recipe courtesy of Chef Sung-Yoon Kang.*

## Food Truck Wisdom

**W**hen time is short and space is limited, think like a food truck chef. Here's what Ka'Chi Truck owner Sung-Yoon Kang has learned in his kitchen on wheels.

Strip a dish down to its essence. Figure out which ingredients make a big impact and cut the rest. No one but a restaurant critic will miss a tablespoon of finely diced jicama in the salad.

Choose compact, multi-tasking kitchen equipment. A super sharp knife works wonders; so does an immersion blender. And both can be cleaned up fast in a tiny sink.

Label everything. If you can find ingredients quickly, not only will you be calmer but other people can jump in easily to lend a hand. One more benefit: less waste. No more throwing out things because you can't remember what they are!

Clean as you go. Whether you're cooking in an apartment's galley kitchen or a tricked out chef's space the size of Kim Kardashian's shoe closet, a tower of dirty dishes yucks your yum.

- 1/2 C. gochujang
- 2-3 Tb. sugar
- Up to 1/4 C. water
- 1 Tb. minced garlic, more to taste
- 4-6 English or Kirby cucumbers, unpeeled and cut 1/4" thick



Put gochujang in a bowl. Add sugar and water, a little bit at a time until the mixture reaches a consistency that's slightly runnier than peanut butter. Add garlic.



## About Kimchi

Spelled kimchi or kimchee, this fermented vegetable dish is a staple of Korean cooking. Among its many positive attributes: it's got good bacteria essential to gut health and lots of fiber. And its spicy, sour, slightly sweet taste pairs well with all manner of rice bowls, soups and stews, even pancakes. No wonder it's on the table at every traditional Korean meal!

While there are as many kimchi variations as there are Korean cooks, napa cabbage kimchi (baechu-kimchi) is the most common. It's made by salting cabbage leaves and coating them with a paste made of hot pepper flakes (gochu-garu), garlic, ginger and fish sauce and putting the mixture in a large jar to ferment.

Impatient cooks like Roy Choi of "L.A. Son" fame start eating kimchi as soon as he spreads the paste. Others take a bite only after the mixture ferments 1–2 days at room temperature. Diehards wait until the kimchi has reached its flavor peak, after a 2-week slow ferment in the fridge. The bottom line: kimchi's flavor and texture change as it ferments, so there's no right or wrong time to enjoy it.

To learn more about kimchi and other Korean dishes, check out one of Chef Kang's favorite blogs: [BeyondKimchee.com](http://BeyondKimchee.com).

In a separate bowl, add 2–3 Tb. of the gochujang mixture to the cucumbers and mix together. Let sit for 15–20 minutes.

Pour out the excess water. Add the rest of the gochujang mixture and enjoy immediately or refrigerate and enjoy for up to a week.

Makes 8–10 servings.

### Korean Grilled Chicken

*I adapted this recipe from Lucky Peach's 101 Easy Asian Recipes. See note about gochujang in Spicy Gochujang Cucumbers recipe. Sriracha works fine here, but if you want to be more authentic, use the gochujang.*



2 Tb. sriracha or gochujang, plus more for serving

3 Tb. loosely packed brown sugar

2 Tb. water

2 Tb. apple cider vinegar

2 Tb. olive oil or other vegetable oil

½ tsp. kosher salt

2 tsp. grated fresh ginger (or 1 tsp. dried minced ginger—

I use Penzey's brand.)

4 boneless, skinless chicken thighs

Scallions, thinly sliced, optional

Whisk together all ingredients except chicken and scallions in a bowl.

Put chicken in a large Ziploc bag and pour marinade over. Refrigerate for 48 hours.

When ready to cook, allow chicken to sit in marinade at room temperature for about 15 minutes, just to take the chill off and to allow the oil in the marinade to liquify.

Heat a grill pan over medium-high heat and cook in batches, about 4–5 minutes per side until chicken reaches an internal temperature of 165°. Do not overcrowd the pan or you may end up steaming the chicken. Note: there will be some smoke, so turn on the exhaust fan before you add the chicken to the pan.

Serve over rice. Garnish with sliced scallions and serve with extra sriracha or gochujang.

Makes 4 servings (2 if people are really hungry).

### Kimchi Pancake with Dipping Sauce

*If you're new to Korean cooking (as I am), this recipe is a great place to start. It's fast and easy, and so delicious that when I asked my family to taste it, they ate the whole thing in less than five minutes.*

*I bought the kimchi from Hmart, an Asian grocery and home goods store with Pennsylvania locations in Upper Darby, Elkins Park and Levittown. It's well worth a trip—especially if you want to pick up ingredients to make your own kimchi or see an entire aisle of chili sauces from all over Asia.*



*This recipe is a hybrid of recipes I found in Lucky Peach's 101 Easy Asian Recipes and Maangchi's Real Korean Cooking.*

*For the kimchi pancake:*

1 C. kimchi  
Water  
¼ C. all-purpose flour  
¼ C. rice flour  
½ tsp. kosher salt  
2 thinly sliced scallions  
2 Tb. canola oil, divided

*For the dipping sauce:*

3 Tb. soy sauce  
1 Tb. sweet red chili sauce  
1 tsp. red pepper flakes, more or less to taste\*

*\*If you're using Korean red pepper flakes, you'll probably want to add more than 1 tsp. to your dipping sauce. Korean flakes don't contain seeds, making them milder than the red pepper flakes from a typical grocery store.*

Place the kimchi in a strainer set over a bowl and push down with the back of a

spoon to release as much liquid as possible. Add more kimchi liquid from the jar and cold water to make ½ cup liquid. Chop and set kimchi aside.

Add both flours and salt to the ½ cup kimchi liquid. Stir and let sit for a few minutes. This mixture should resemble thick pancake batter. If it's too doughy, add more water, 1 tsp. at a time until you reach the right consistency. Mix in the chopped kimchi and scallions. Let sit for a few more minutes.

Heat 1 Tb. oil in a 12-inch skillet set over medium-high heat. Add kimchi mixture to skillet and spread nearly to edges. Cook for 3–4 minutes and flip.

Add the remaining 1 Tb. oil around the edge of the pancake and lift pancake so oil spreads underneath it. Cook for 1–2 more minutes until pancake is golden.

Remove from skillet and let sit on a cutting board for a few minutes.

Meanwhile, whisk together soy sauce, chili sauce and red pepper flakes. Cut into

8 wedges. Serve with dipping sauce.

Makes 2–4 servings. ♦

*Laura traces her love of all things culinary to the first time she leafed through her mother's Betty Crocker's Cooky Book—which still occupies a place of honor among her 700+ cookbooks. A passionate supporter of local food, she co-founded a farmers market, judges area food contests, and anticipates restaurant openings with the excitement most people reserve for winning a Mega Millions jackpot.*



For more great recipes visit  
[CountyLinesMagazine.com](http://CountyLinesMagazine.com)