Sauces / South Korea

Gochujang Paste

Korean gochugaru chili fermented with meju powder, glutinous rice, and salt over weeks — a deep brick-red paste with layers of sweet, spicy, and savory complexity that no commercial tub can replicate, the foundational flavor of Korean cooking.

Time 43240 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 100 parts Korean gochugaru (coarse red pepper flakes)
- ☐ 50 parts Glutinous rice flour (sweet rice flour)
- ☐ 150 parts Water
- ☐ 30 parts Meju powder (fermented soybean powder)
- ☐ 40 parts Yeotgireum (barley malt syrup) or honey
- ☐ 20 parts Salt (non-iodized)

Let's make it.

01 Whisk the glutinous rice flour into the cold water until no lumps remain, then transfer to a small saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon or whisk, for 5–7 minutes until the mixture thickens to a thick, glossy porridge — it should hold a brief trail when you drag a spoon through it, like very thick cream of wheat. This porridge is the fermentation substrate and provides the sugars that the microorganisms will slowly convert. Remove from heat and cool to room temperature before combining with other ingredients.

02 In a large non-reactive bowl, combine the cooled rice porridge, gochugaru, meju powder, yeotgireum (barley malt syrup or honey), and salt. Mix thoroughly with a wooden spoon or, wearing gloves, by hand. The mixture will initially look like it cannot possibly combine — the gochugaru is dry and the porridge is wet — but after 3–5 minutes of mixing it will come together into a thick, uniform deep-red paste. It should be the consistency of peanut butter — stiff but spreadable.

03 Transfer to a traditional onggi clay pot or, practically, a wide-mouth glass jar. Smooth the surface flat, then press a piece of parchment paper or plastic wrap directly onto the surface to prevent a crust from forming. Cover the jar loosely with cloth. Store outdoors in a sunny spot (traditional) or in a warm room (18–25°C). Over 4 weeks, the paste will ferment: the meju's enzymes will break down proteins and starches into glutamates and sugars, the chili will mellow slightly, and the paste will develop the characteristic gochujang depth. Stir daily for the first week. The longer it ferments, the more complex the flavor — some cooks ferment for 6 months.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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