Main dishes / South Korea

Japchae

Silky sweet potato glass noodles tossed with julienned vegetables and soy-marinated beef, glinting under a lacquer of sesame oil and sugar — soft, chewy, and deeply savory with every forkful. Each component is cooked separately and married at the last moment so nothing loses its color or texture.

Time 60 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- [ ] 200 g Dangmyeon (sweet potato glass noodles)
- [ ] 150 g Beef sirloin or ribeye, julienned
- [ ] 60 ml Soy sauce
- [ ] 20 g Sugar
- [ ] 30 ml Sesame oil
- [ ] 10 g Garlic, minced
- [ ] 2 pcs Eggs
- [ ] 100 g Spinach, blanched and squeezed
- [ ] 80 g Shiitake mushrooms, julienned
- [ ] 80 g Carrot, julienned
- [ ] 60 g Red bell pepper, julienned
- [ ] 30 ml Neutral oil (grapeseed or canola)
- [ ] 10 g Toasted sesame seeds
- [ ] 5 g Fine sea salt

Let's make it.

01 Julienne the beef into strips roughly 5 cm long and 3 mm thick, cutting against the grain. Combine 2 tablespoons of soy sauce, 1 tablespoon of sugar, 1 tablespoon of sesame oil, and all of the minced garlic in a bowl. Add the beef, toss thoroughly so every strip is coated, and let it sit at room temperature while you prep the other components — at least 15 minutes. The sugar draws out the beef's surface moisture and allows rapid caramelization in the pan. Do not salt additionally; the soy carries all the salinity the beef needs. The strips should smell deeply savory and faintly sweet, with the garlic softening and becoming aromatic as it sits.

02 Bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil. Drop the dangmyeon noodles in without breaking them — they will soften and uncurl on their own. Cook for 6–8 minutes, stirring occasionally to prevent clumping. Taste a noodle: it should be fully translucent all the way through with a pleasantly chewy resistance — not gummy in the center, not mushy. Drain immediately and rinse under cold running water to stop cooking and remove excess starch. Shake the colander hard. While still warm, toss the noodles with 1 tablespoon of soy sauce and 1 teaspoon of sesame oil to season them and prevent them from sticking together. Use kitchen scissors to snip the noodles two or three times — this makes them far easier to toss and eat without losing their essential chew.

03 Work each vegetable separately — this is the labor of japchae and the source of its beauty. Heat a wok or wide skillet over high heat until it just begins to smoke. Add a teaspoon of neutral oil and stir-fry the carrot julienne for 90 seconds with a pinch of salt; it should still have a slight bite. Remove to a plate. Repeat with the bell pepper (60 seconds — it should stay vivid red), then the shiitake mushrooms (2 minutes, until their edges begin to brown and they smell deeply woody). For the spinach, blanch briefly in salted boiling water, drain, squeeze hard until almost dry, toss with a few drops of sesame oil and a pinch of salt. Cook the eggs as a thin jidan: beat yolks and whites separately if precision matters, cook as two thin omelets, let cool, slice into 5 cm strips. Each vegetable cooked alone retains its individual color, aroma, and texture — cooking them together muds both flavor and appearance.

04 Heat the wok over the highest flame your stove allows until it's visibly shimmering and beginning to smoke. Add a thin film of neutral oil. Spread the marinated beef in a single layer — do not crowd the pan or the meat will steam rather than sear. Cook undisturbed for 60–90 seconds until the bottom develops a dark caramelized crust from the sugar in the marinade. Toss and cook for another 30 seconds. The beef should be just cooked through — in a dish like japchae it should be tender, not stiff. The marinade sugar will char slightly in places, adding a pleasant bitterness that balances the sweetness of the sauce. Work in two batches if the pan is full; a crowded pan steams and the glaze turns into a puddle.

05 In the largest bowl or the wok itself, combine the seasoned noodles, all the cooked vegetables, and the beef. Drizzle over the remaining soy sauce, sugar, and sesame oil — taste as you go; japchae is meant to be distinctly sweet-savory, so be bold with both the sugar and the soy. Toss everything together gently but thoroughly with tongs or clean hands, lifting from the bottom to distribute everything evenly without breaking the noodles. Taste repeatedly and adjust: more sugar if it lacks warmth, more soy if it's flat, more sesame oil for richness and aroma. Transfer to a serving platter and arrange the egg jidan strips over the top. Scatter sesame seeds liberally. Japchae is excellent at room temperature and actually improves after resting 20 minutes — the noodles absorb the sauce and the flavors marry.

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