

Winter Kuksu

Serves 4

For the pickled cucumber

- 2 small Korean cucumbers
or ½ English cucumber
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon sea salt

For the beef

- 10½ ounces beef sirloin or
tenderloin
- 2 teaspoons Korean
chile powder
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil

For the broth

- 4 cups hot beef stock
- 1 tablespoon dark soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- a small bunch of fresh dill
fronds, chopped

To serve

- 4 cups egg noodles, fresh
or dried
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- ½ cup kimchi
- 1 tablespoon sesame seeds,
toasted

Eaten hot in winter, cold in summer, this noodle soup is one of the most popular Koryo-saram dishes. It is also one where the fusion of East and Central Asian flavors can most clearly be tasted. The sweet, umami-laden beef broth familiar to Korean palates is scented with dill and toasted sesame seeds as a nod to its regional home.

This recipe uses a quick pickled cucumber and kimchi, but you can vary these elements, depending on what you have on hand. Typical additions could include salted radishes, grated beets, stir-fried seasonal vegetables, grilled bell peppers, or hard-boiled eggs. The soup is served with each ingredient arranged separately around the bowl.

For the pickled cucumber, shave the cucumbers into ribbons using a mandolin, or slice into thin discs with a knife. Toss with the sugar and salt, and let pickle for 10 minutes. Rinse off the seasoning and pat dry with paper towels. Taste to check if it needs a little more sweetness or salt.

For the beef, preheat a ridged grill pan. Rub the steak with the chile powder, a little salt, then the sesame oil. When the pan is very hot, sear the steak for 1 to 2 minutes on each side, until done to your liking. Set aside, covered, to rest while you make the broth.

For the broth, heat the stock in a large pan and add all its aromatics. Taste to check the balance of flavors and adjust accordingly for sweetness, saltiness, or tang.

Cook the noodles according to the package instructions. Drain and toss with the sesame oil. Mound a nest of noodles into the middle of four serving bowls and ladle over the hot broth. Slice the beef and pile onto one side of each bowl, drizzling with any meaty juices. Fill the remaining two-thirds of each bowl with a tangle of pickled cucumber and another of kimchi. Finally, sprinkle with the sesame seeds before serving.

