

KITCHEN NOTEBOOK

Time to explore: How to make a foolproof génoise, one of the most versatile cakes ... pork sirloin and why it's a cut above ... all about some key Korean ingredients. BY JANE DANIELS LEAR



BE A GÉNOISE GENIUS

What do a grand wedding cake, a humble jelly roll, and the deceptively understated bourbon banana pudding on page 92 have in common? They're all made with the airy spongecake called génoise, which was born to absorb flavored syrups. Although génoise is not particularly difficult to make, there are a few tricks worth remembering. Eggs add richness and flavor to the cake, obviously, but they are its leavening as well, and absolutely crucial to its structure. Rather than simply bringing them to room temperature, **warm the eggs** (in the shell) in hot water for five minutes. That one tiny detail goes a long way to ensure the volume of the

finished génoise. It's also important not to rush the step called **ribboning**. Beat the eggs with the sugar and vanilla at high speed until the mixture is thick enough to form a ribbon from lifted beaters. It should drop in a wide, flat band that folds in on itself, the way heavy satin would, and it should hold its shape on top of the batter (see photo, top left). This usually takes about 8 minutes with a stand mixer and up to 16 minutes with a handheld, but if the mixture still falls in a thin, straight column, keep beating. What ribboning tells you is that the sugar has dissolved completely and the eggs are well aerated, which allows them to disperse evenly

throughout (and thus lift) the batter. If you don't beat the eggs enough, the génoise won't rise and there may be a rubbery layer on the bottom. **How you fold** is also vital. A wide bowl allows you to see that you've folded in the sifted flour thoroughly (see photo, top right). Before folding in the fat, stir it into ¼ cup batter to lighten it; the two mixtures will combine more easily that way. Lastly, be gentle and quick when folding: Cut down toward the center of the batter with a rubber spatula, then lift up some batter from the bottom of the bowl. Turn the bowl with your other hand as you continue to rhythmically cut down and lift up batter.

TO SIRLOIN, WITH LOVE

Sirloin pork cutlets or chops (see page 49) come from the part of a pig's (very long) loin nearest the hip. The fact that they're inexpensive and naturally dark or two-toned in color doesn't mean that they're of poorer quality than paler loin chops or rib chops. In fact, they are tender, juicy, and full of wonderful flavor. They also behave beautifully during cooking: Both loin and rib chops have a tighter, denser texture that turns bouncy or cottony if cooked a second or so too long; sirloin cuts are much more forgiving.

A TASTE OF KOREA

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

HOT RED-PEPPER THREADS (SIL KOCH'U) Much of the robust exuberance of this Asian cuisine comes from red or green Korean hot chiles. Sometimes dried red chiles are machine-cut into slender threads that look, at first glance, like saffron. Traditionally used as a garnish, they add beauty, heat, and a trace of raisiny sweetness to dishes such as the cucumber apple pickle on page 68. The red-pepper threads, which are sold in packets, are available at Korean markets and at koalmart.com. Wrapped well, they'll keep in the refrigerator for several months.

TOFU (TUBU; ALSO CALLED BEAN CURD OR SOYBEAN CURD) This protein-rich food has been eaten in China (where it was first made) and elsewhere in Asia for centuries. Readily available and easy to prepare, tofu also gives a cook endless opportunities, since it takes to the flavors of any sauce. It comes in degrees of firmness; extra-firm is good for frying, for instance, and soft tofu is ideal for simmering (see page 72). In a container of water, tofu keeps for up to four days in the refrigerator. (It's perishable, so change the water daily.)

HOT RED-PEPPER FLAKES (KOCH'U KARU) It's impossible to imagine classic cabbage kimchi (the fermented-vegetable dish unique to Korea) without these crushed dried red chiles (see pages 68 and 72). But they were, in fact, a fairly recent addition to an ancient preparation: Chiles, a new-world ingredient, weren't introduced to Korea until the Japanese invasion of the late 1500s, and the first recorded use of them in kimchi wasn't until 1766. Korean flakes don't contain any seeds, unlike the crushed red-pepper flakes we see in American stores. They're available from the sources mentioned in the first entry above; stored in the refrigerator, they'll stay potent for months.

DRIED RED DATES (TAECH'U; ALSO CALLED JUJUBES OR CHINESE DATES) These pliable beads are not true dates, from a date palm, but rather the unrelated sun-dried fruit of various spiny little trees that are cultivated throughout Asia, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean. Like ginseng, red dates are appreciated primarily for their healthful properties (they're said to be a tonic for the spleen and the stomach). They lend sweetness and color both to savory dishes, such as the short rib stew on page 73, and to confections. Look for them at Asian markets and keep them in a cool, dry place.

ROASTED BARLEY (PORI) The oldest cultivated cereal grain in the world is the base for a simple folk tea (page 68) that many Asians imbibe for its full-bodied, nutty flavor, as well as for its digestive properties. It's not strictly a tea (which can only be made with leaves of the tea plant), but a tisane, or infusion. While researching this ingredient, we discovered with great delight that the word *tisane* evolved from the classical Greek *ptisane*, meaning "barley water." (Somewhere, the gods are smiling.) Roasted barley is available at Asian markets and koalmart.com.

HOT RED-PEPPER PASTE (KOCH'UJANG OR GOCHUJANG) This condiment is one of Korea's most extraordinary gifts to the culinary world. Made from dried hot red-pepper flakes, fermented soybean paste, and glutinous ("sweet") rice flour, it gives a miso-like mellow wallop to the short rib stew on page 73 (look in Korean markets or go to koalmart.com for a brand that doesn't contain artificial coloring or other additives). We also stir it into everything from pot roast and soups to mayonnaise dressing for coleslaw to less-than-exciting Chinese takeout. It probably keeps in the fridge forever, but we go through it so fast we can't really say for sure.

SOJU Much of Korea's rich history in spiritmaking and winemaking was lost during Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945), when production was banned. *Soju*—basically a Korean vodka—is one of the beverages that survived. Distilled from glutinous ("sweet") rice, barley, wheat, millet, and other grains, as well as potatoes and sweet potatoes, it's 40 to 45 percent alcohol by volume. We use *soju* in a cocktail (page 68), but many Koreans drink it straight up—it should always be served chilled—throughout dinner. Like wine or sake, *soju* (available at Korean markets with liquor licenses) is meant to be finished quickly, not opened and then relegated to the drinks cabinet alongside the gin.

ROASTED CORN (OKSUSU) Like roasted barley (above), this is an ingredient in a folk tea (page 68), or tisane, and you can find it in the same markets. The two are often brewed together, as the sweet corn balances the slight edginess of the barley. The reason, by the way, that herbal or grain infusions predominate over black or green teas in Korea is a remnant of Confucianism, which thrived during the Choson dynasty (1392–1910). Tea drinking was forbidden, as it was associated with Buddhist beliefs. Corn, which is native to the New World, wasn't introduced into Korea until after the Japanese invasion of the late 16th century. ■



ROMULO YANES FOOD STYLING; ANDREA ALBIN