

As a special to this regular feature, we are exploring the remarkable world of Napa Cabbage.



Cabbage Head

There is a new head of the block. Ok, maybe it's not so new. But as far as cabbage is concerned, Napa is the up and coming new star appearing in dishes in cities everywhere!

Cabbage is a mainstay player in many of our old favorites – coleslaw, cabbage soup, corned beef and cabbage. The Chinese have used cabbage in many of their dishes including the ever-popular Chop Suey. And it is quite appropriate since the Chinese brought a predecessor to the modern Napa to the United States in the ninetieth century.ⁱ This is one reason why Napa cabbage is often referred to as Chinese cabbage.

Tracing the roots of cabbage we find that all cabbages (including kale, cauliflower, kohlrabi, broccoli, and Brussels sprouts) are all differing varieties of the same plant species - *Brassica oleracea*.ⁱⁱ The differences in the varieties are a result of cultivating the plant to meet specific needs over the past few thousands of years. As cabbages are thought to have been cultivated for over four thousands years, originating in the Mediterranean,ⁱⁱⁱ this fact makes sense.

But Napa cabbage, in particular, hosts a very adaptable quality – it tends to take on the flavor of the ingredients that it is near.

Pickled Napa Cabbage

Chef Jack Schoop
via Andrews 228

- 3 cups water
- 1 cup white vinegar
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 2 pounds cabbage -- julienned
- 1 pound daikon -- julienned
- 1 carrot -- julienned
- 2 jalapeno -- minced
- 2 cloves garlic -- minced
- 2 ounces fresh ginger -- minced

Soak daikon in cold water for 5 minutes. Drain.

Dissolve sugar and salt into water and vinegar in large plastic container.

Add remaining ingredients; mix well.

Store under refrigeration for 24 hours.

Pickled Napa Cabbage continued...

Per Serving (excluding unknown items): 17 Calories; trace Fat (3.6% calories from fat); trace Protein; 4g Carbohydrate; 1g Dietary Fiber; 0mg Cholesterol; 242mg Sodium. Exchanges: 1/2 Vegetable; 0 Fat; 0 Other Carbohydrates.

This is the reason why it has such a milder taste when mixed into a stir-fry or a slaw. The cabbage presence actually takes a backseat to other flavors, yet still provides a nice crunch when served raw or just barely cooked. The recipe in this article demonstrates this principle.

As tasty as this roughage can be, it is also susceptible to a couple of things, one of which is pepper spot. This is a series of tiny black dots that appear on the ribs and leaves of the cabbage head. Caused by a bacteria, it is simply a blemish on the plant that develops over time, especially if the crop that was harvested was exposed to extremely cold temperatures.^{iv}

Another enemy of the cabbage is overcooking. The 'lovely' aroma that is often associated with cooked cabbage is often the result of too much heat. Cabbage texture, nutrients and flavor are best retained when cooked for only a few minutes.

Packing nearly two and a half grams of dietary fiber, Napa cabbage also holds twenty-one milligrams of vitamin C. To round out its nutrition, Napa contains a phytochemical – called indoles – that have been cited as a cancer-fighting agent.^v

Considering napa's chameleon-like qualities in dishes as well as its nutritive assets, serving up a side of a Napa slaw with your next meal could really pay off – cabbage head!

ⁱ <http://www.cabbagetown-toronto.com/aboutcabbages.html>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.ag.usask.ca/cofa/departments/hort/hortinfo/veg/cabbage.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.cabbagetown-toronto.com/aboutcabbages.html>

^{iv} <http://cetulare.ucdavis.edu/pubveg/cab95.htm>

^v http://www.wholehealthmd.com/refshelf/foods_view/1%2C1523%2C187%2C00.html

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