

Korean Fried Chicken

BY SARAH AHN & NAM SOON AHN | @AHNESTKITCHEN

Korean Fried Chicken is an iconic yasik enjoyed throughout Korea and in America. But its origins are actually quite fascinating, connecting us back to America.

During and after the Korean War in the 1950s, American soldiers stationed in Korea introduced American fried chicken to the country, particularly the Southern American version. This version, as we may know, has a long history in the United States with deep roots in African American cooking traditions.

But the Korean fried chicken we know and love today didn't develop overnight. It is a phenomenon that lifted off after decades of unintentional recipe development. Cooking oil didn't become widely accessible until the 1970s where Korea's poultry industry expanded as well. WIth this combination, by the 1980s, Koreans had started putting their own spin on the American dish, sprinkling in Korean pantry ingredients like garlic, soy sauce, and gochujang into sweet, savory, and spicy sauces.

Today, Korean fried chicken comes in two distinct iconic flavors: Original and Yangnyeom (sweet and spicy) Chicken.

Umma's fried chicken is not just "good enough"—it's exceptional. It brings me back to the amazement that I felt in Korea. Her fried chicken is a work of art—perfectly crispy, yet light and flavored with a harmonious blend of spices. Described by Umma as a "wave-patterned" crust (meant to resemble the waves of the ocean) and accomplished by "shocking" the battered chicken by tapping it against the bowl before frying it, the distinctive pattern is key to achieving the signature crisp and crunch. Having now shared this with friends, family, and fried chicken lovers in my life, I can say that Umma's fried chicken has been repeatedly hailed as some of the best.

Korean Fried Chicken Recipe, from UMMA, pg. 200

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SERVES: 4-6 **TOTAL TIME:** 1 ¼ hours + 3 hours soaking and seasoning

INGREDIENTS

3 lbs (1.4 kg) chicken wings, cut at joints, wingtips discarded
2½ cups milk
2 tsp black pepper, divided
1 tsp miwon matsogeum (MSG seasoning salt)
3½ cups (420 g) Korean frying mix, divided
5 tbsp (50 g) curry powder, divided
1 tbsp Dasida beef stock powder
1 tbsp garlic powder
1 tbsp onion powder
1 ½ cups cold water
2–3 qts vegetable oil for frying

Sauce

7 tbsp (119 g) ketchup
7 tbsp (105 g) sriracha
⅓ cup water
5 tbsp honey
3 tbsp minced garlic
2 tbsp sugar
2 tbsp mirin
1 tbsp soy sauce
1 tbsp gochujang
1 tbsp gochugaru
1 tsp Dasida beef stock powder

Recipe continue...

INSTRUCTIONS

01 Rinse, drain the chicken, then transfer it to a large bowl or container. Add the milk and toss to coat. Arrange the chicken in an even layer, making sure all the chicken is submerged in the milk. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour.

02 Drain and thoroughly rinse the chicken until the water runs clear. Clean and dry the bowl. Using the tip of a sharp paring knife, pierce each wing 3 to 5 times on each side around the bone (the tip of the knife should puncture through to the other side). Pat the chicken dry with paper towels and transfer to the bowl.

03 Add 1 teaspoon pepper and the seasoning salt and toss the chicken to coat. Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours or overnight.

04 Set a wire rack in a rimmed baking sheet. Following the manufacturer's instructions, heat the oil in an electric fryer to 330 degrees. Whisk 11/2 cups (180 grams) frying mix, 3 tablespoons curry powder, the Dasida powder, garlic powder, and onion powder together in a separate large bowl. Gradually whisk in the cold water until the batter is just combined (it's okay if small lumps remain; be careful not to overmix). Add the chicken and toss to coat it in the batter.

05 Whisk the remaining 2 cups (240 grams) frying mix, remaining 2 tablespoons curry powder, and remaining 1 teaspoon pepper together in a medium bowl. Working with 1 piece at a time, use tongs to fully coat the chicken in the batter once more. Lift the wing, allowing excess batter to drip back into the bowl, and transfer it to the seasoned frying mixture. Using your hands, toss the wing to coat it (do not press the piece into the flour), then gently tap the wing against the side of the bowl twice to "shock" it (this is what gives the fried chicken its wave pattern).

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06 Carefully lower half of the wing piece into the hot oil, hold for 3 seconds, then release the piece completely into the oil. Repeat with 5 more wing pieces. Cook, undisturbed, for about 2 minutes, then use the tongs to release the wings from the base of the fryer basket. Continue to cook, turning the wings occasionally, until golden brown and crisp and the chicken registers at least 165 degrees, 5 to 7 minutes for wingettes and 7 to 10 minutes for drumettes.
6 Using a slotted spoon, transfer the wings to the prepared rack as they finish cooking. Return the oil to 330 degrees and repeat with the remaining wings in batches. Serve.

07 Sauce

Whisk all of the ingredients together in a small saucepan. Bring to a simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until thickened, about 4 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and set aside while frying the chicken. Once all of the chicken wings have been fried, brush the sauce onto the wings. (You can also dip the wings individually into the sauce to coat them, but avoid tossing all the wings with the sauce at once, as this will break apart the delicate crunchy “wave” coating on the chicken.)