

National Immigrant Heritage Month

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June is a special time of year for immigrants all over the United States, as the month is reserved for the celebration of National Immigrant Heritage Month. National Immigrant Heritage Month aims to honor the contributions and diverse cultures of immigrants to this country. The designation of this special month began when former President Barack Obama issued a presidential proclamation establishing June as National Immigrant Heritage Month.

It is important to understand the mission and purpose of this month. The goal is to promote understanding and appreciation for the immigrant experience and the valuable contributions immigrants have made and continue to make to American society. It becomes ever more critical to give space to this important month during these contemporary times where the value of immigrants are continuously being eroded.

As a South Korean immigrant, I have lived both the fulfilling and damaging experiences that come with the "immigrant experience." For every blessing that comes with the immigrant experience, there is too often an unexpected consequence that immigrants have to be burdened with.

A notable blessing that comes from this unique experience is the merger of seemingly opposing cultures, where the resulting "hybrid" culture often retains the strengths of both cultures. As a child living in this foreign country, I saw this play out most prominently in our family's cuisine. The spice filled Korean diet was not one I expected to mix well with the savory American cuisine, but I was happily proven wrong with the greatest culinary invention of all time:

Kimchi Fries.

As a Korean child, I could never have imagined our beloved Kimchi being mixed with something like the French Fry. Kimchi seemed to be everything that the French Fry was not. It was fresh, healthy, spicy, and most importantly, so not American. Who could have imagined that such a seemingly odd combination of foods would pair for a delicious treat. The two separate dishes brought out the best in each other. However, as I said, there are often negative drawbacks that come with the immigrant experience.

I vividly remember my first day at an American school. For lunch, my mother had prepared for me our newly discovered favorite dish: the Kimchi Fries. The moment I opened my lunchbox in the school cafeteria, I immediately noticed my peers giving me looks of what I thought was curiosity. Moments later, while I was in the middle of eating my Kimchi Fries, an older student, who apparently did not appreciate my food, came by my table and proceeded to slap my lunch box onto the lunchroom floor. Looking at the kimchi splattered across the lunchroom floor, I remember being in shock. I quickly realized that this was the price to pay for being "different" in this country. Because the price was too high for my younger self, I immediately asked my mother to stop packing my lunches.

Immigrants bring so much of the "culture" we experience here today. In enjoying the fruits of the various cultures that thrive within the United States, I hope my personal story can show the cost immigrants often have to pay for everyone else to enjoy it. More specifically, during National Immigrant Heritage Month, I encourage everyone to be mindful of the "fullness" of the immigrant experience.

Lastly, in the spirit of National Immigrant Heritage Month, I wanted to share my favorite dish with you all.

LOADED KIMCHI FRIES

This Kimchi Fries recipe is loaded with layers of bulgogi, caramelized kimchi, and easy but epic sauces that will change up your snack time!

Cook Time: 35 minutes

Servings: 2 people

Author: Chef Chris Cho

INGREDIENTS:

French Fries

- 3 pcs Yukon or Idaho Potatoes
- Olive Oil, enough to coat potatoes
- Salt and Pepper, to taste
- 1 cup Kimchi
- 1 tbsp Sesame Oil
- 1/2 tbsp Sugar
- 1/2 tbsp Gochujang or Korean Red Pepper Paste

Kimchi Fries Sauce

- 1 cup Cheez Whiz
- 1/2 cup Japanese Mayo
- 2 tbsp Sriracha Sauce

Ground Beef Bulgogi

- 1/2 cup Ground Beef
- 1 1/2 tbsp Soy Sauce
- 1 tbsp Sesame Oil
- 1 tbsp Sugar
- Pepper To taste
- 1/2 tbsp Garlic

Garnish

- 1/2 Onion Minced Cilantro
- Optional - Sesame Seeds

INSTRUCTIONS:

French Fries

1. Slice the potatoes in French fry shape, evenly.
2. Soak them in water for 30 minutes, drain, then pat dry.
3. Season with olive oil, salt, and pepper.
4. Place half the potatoes in the air fryer with spaces between each other.
5. Fry at 380 F for 12 minutes, flip, then fry for another 12 minutes.
6. Do the same for the next batch of potatoes.

Kimchi Fries Topping

1. Saute the Kimchi with sesame oil, sugar, and gochujang until all the sauce is caramelized beautifully.
2. Stir fry the ground beef with soy sauce, sesame oil, sugar, pepper, and garlic until cooked evenly.

Kimchi Fries Sauce

1. Microwave Cheez Whiz until melted, set aside.
2. Combine mayonnaise and sriracha, mix thoroughly, and set aside.

Assembly

1. Layer potatoes, kimchi, ground beef, onion.
2. Drizzle Cheez Whiz and spicy mayo.
3. Garnish with cilantro and sesame seeds.
4. Serve immediately and enjoy!