

Yaksik Rice Cake

Tasty and Healthy Treat

Korea's traditional food culture has long been centered on a belief that food and medicine share similar roots. This is reflected in the meaning of *yaksik* (medicinal food), which is formed by combining *yak* (medicine) with *sik* (food).

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Yaksik is a type of *tteok* (rice cake), made with glutinous rice combined with other ingredients.

Although yaksik has been traditionally associated with Jeongwol Daeboreum, the 15th day of the first lunar month, it is frequently served at special occasions, such as weddings, birthday parties, and festive events. The tradition of eating yaksik on the occasion of Jeongwol Daeboreum is said to have originated from the following incident.

During the 10th year of his reign, King Soji (?-500) of the Silla Kingdom (57 B.C.-935 A.D.) visited Mt. Namsan, located to the south of the Gyeongju capital, on Jeongwol Daeboreum to observe the full moon. According to legend, a flock of crows suddenly gathered around the king and warned him that a treacherous plot had been planned by the queen and several monks. To express his gratitude to the crows, the king decreed that Jeongwol Daeboreum would hereafter be identified as Ogiil (烏忌日) (ritual day for crows). He also ordered the making of a dark-colored *yakbap* (medicinal rice), with a color similar to that of the crows, and for a ritual ceremony to be held in honor of the crows. This tradition has been passed down to the present day, with yaksik being recognized as a symbol of Daeboreum (the first full moon of the lunar year) and the king's gratitude.

Medicinal Ingredients

In the past, the traditional ingredients of yaksik, such as honey and jujubes, were not readily available and rather costly for the common people, which meant that it could only be enjoyed on certain special occasions. Nowadays, however, due to the ready availability of these ingredients, and their relatively less expensive prices, yaksik can be enjoyed at any time, along with being regularly included in the diet of those who pursue a health-conscious lifestyle. As the health benefits of traditional foods, such as tteok, are made known to their good health. This belief is evident in the term *yangnyeom*, which can be translated as seasoning, which had been derived from *yaknyeom*, that refers to the beneficial ingredients used in various kinds of seasonings.

The expression *yaksik dongwon*, which basically means that medicine and food share similar roots, is often used to describe the philosophical principles behind Korea's traditional food culture. As such, yaksik can be understood as a representative example of this long-held belief. And in fact, yaksik's ingredients include chestnuts, jujubes, pine nuts, and cinnamon, which are used for the making of oriental medicine as well.

Chestnuts are a source of carbohydrates, protein, fat, calcium, and vitamins A, B, and C. Since vitamin C





Today, due to the ready availability of ingredients, and their relatively less expensive prices, yaksik can be enjoyed at any time, along with being regularly included in the diet of those who pursue a health-conscious lifestyle. Nowadays, convenient individual servings of yaksik can be bought at a fast-growing number of rice cake outlets.

Yaksik

Ingredients

5 cups glutinous rice, 10 chestnuts, 5 jujubes, 3 tablespoons pine nuts, 1 cup sugar, 3 tablespoons soy sauce, 6 tablespoons sesame oil, 1 teaspoon cinnamon powder, caramel sauce (6 tablespoons sugar, 3 tablespoons water, 3 tablespoons hot water)

Preparation

- 1 Wash the glutinous rice and allow it to soak in water for at least 6 hours. Line a steamer with cheesecloth and place the glutinous rice on the steamer bottom. Steam the rice for 40 minutes. Add cold water and stir the mixture two or three times during the steaming process.
- 2 Peel the chestnuts and cut each into 3 to 4 pieces. Remove the seeds from the jujubes and cut each into 2 to 3 pieces. Trim the pine nuts, if necessary.
- 3 Prepare the caramel sauce. Heat the sugar and water over low heat. When the mixture begins to bubble, remove from the heat and stir thoroughly. Resume heating until the mixture thickens and takes on a brownish hue, then add hot water to create an even consistency.
- 4 Add the sugar, soy sauce, caramel sauce, sesame oil, and cinnamon to the hot steamed glutinous rice, and mix thoroughly. Add the chestnuts and jujubes, and allow to stand for 2 hours.
- 5 Spread the mixture out on the bottom of the steamer, and steam for about 1 hour. Place in a container and garnish with pine nuts. Allow to cool and set.
- 6 Cut the yaksik into pieces and serve. Any leftovers can be refrigerated or frozen.

can help to absorb alcohol, chestnuts are an ideal side dish when drinking. Vitamin C also promotes sound growth, recovery from fatigue, and healthy skin, along with preventing the onset of colds. Carbohydrates contain an enzyme that improves gastric processes and helps to prevent adult diseases and maintain proper kidney function.

Jujubes serve as a diuretic, invigorant, and relaxant, and are thus widely used as an ingredient in various foods as well as medicines. The vegetable fat of pine nuts includes an unsaturated fatty acid that helps to lower blood pressure by decreasing the cholesterol level. It is also known to contribute to youthful-looking skin. Cinnamon can help to reduce discomfort of the chest and abdomen by stimulating blood circulation, enhance appetite, and facilitate digestion, while providing an antiseptic agent that regulates fermentation within the intestinal tract. The primary ingredient in yaksik is glutinous rice, which contains a higher content of amylopectin than regular rice.

Tasty and Attractive

The tastiness of yaksik is appealing to Koreans and foreigners alike. The sweetness of yaksik, along with the chestnut and cinnamon flavors, can offset the fatty aftertaste of meat. The red jujubes, yellow pine nuts, and brownish glutinous rice, sprinkled with cinnamon, create a delectable and visually appealing dish, which can be served as a tasty dessert or healthy snack.

In contrast to a majority of traditional Korean foods prepared for special occasions, yaksik is simple to prepare and can be made with regular ingredients. The first step involves preparation of the glutinous rice, to which the chestnuts, jujubes, soy sauce, honey, sugar, sesame oil, and cinnamon are added, and then placed in a steamer. After steaming, pine nuts are added as a garnish to complete the dish. Once the yaksik sets, it can be cut into pieces and served. Any leftovers can be refrigerated or frozen. 🍴