

BULGOGI ❖

In December, 2016, we found ourselves stopping for the night in Flagstaff, AZ, on our way to New Mexico. It was dinner time, dark, and the city was overcrowded with vacationing skiers. After trudging the streets outside our hotel, whose dining room had an unacceptably long waiting list, we chanced upon a small Korean restaurant with steamed-up windows. Desperately, we entered, not knowing what to expect. What I found was bulgogi.

Bulgogi, I learned, is an extremely popular Korean delicacy made (usually) of thin, marinated slices of beef that are grilled on a barbecue or stove-top griddle and then served on a small table-top hibachi. The dish originated in the northern Korean Peninsula and migrated to South Korea during WWII, where it is now widely found in fancy restaurants as well as supermarkets selling pan-ready ingredients. In homes it is often stir-fried in a wok or pan. There are even bulgogi-marinated hamburgers sold in South Korean fast-food restaurants, served with lettuce, tomato, onion, and sometimes cheese.

The term bulgogi literally translates to “fire meat” in English, and high-quality sirloin, rib eye, or even brisket are the cuts of choice for the classic dish.

My version of the dish follows the classic recipe as closely as my dietary guidelines allow. I generally don’t use a grill, barbecue, or hibachi, although I suppose I could, if I weren’t so impatient while preparing the weekday evening meal. If you do not share this proclivity, by all means, pull out the barbecue or smoker.

- ½ medium onion**
- 3 green onions (scallions)**
- 4” piece of carrot**
- 1 lb beef (tenderloin, rib eye, or sirloin), thinly sliced**

- cooking spray**
- 2 tsp olive oil**
- 1 tsp toasted sesame oil**
- 2 tsp white sesame seeds, roasted or toasted**

Bulgogi Marinade

- 4 tbsp reduced-salt soy sauce**
- 1 tbsp toasted sesame oil**
- 2 tbsp “brown sugar” blend¹**
- 8 cloves garlic**
- 4 tbsp organic pear juice (or unsweetened apple sauce)**
- ¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper**

Prepare the beef: Put the beef in the freezer, if fresh, or thaw partially, if frozen, until it is firm enough to use an electric slicer to produce thin slices.

Make the marinade: In a large bowl, pour in the soy sauce and sesame oil. Add the brown “sugar” blend and stir until dissolved.

Crush the garlic into a purée and add to the marinade. Add the pear juice (or apple sauce) and black pepper and mix all together.

Cut the onion into very thin slices. Cut the green onions into 2” lengths and slit each stalk lengthwise. Use a vegetable peeler to slice the carrot into long, thin slices. Add the onion scallions, and carrot into the marinade and mix well.

Add the meat to the marinade, separating the slices so that each comes in contact with the marinade. Mix evenly. Refrigerate for an hour, or preferably, overnight.

Spray a large skillet with the cooking spray and add a little olive oil. Raise the heat and wait until hot enough to sizzle the meat when added to the pan. Cook the marinated meat in single layers until cooked through, say 1 minute per side, depending on meat quality.

¹Use the Splenda product of this name, or use 1 tbsp brown sugar and 1 tsp sucralose.

As pieces of beef become done, transfer them to a platter. Once all are cooked, add the sesame oil to the skillet and transfer the meat back into it. Mix the pieces so that they become coated with the oil.

Transfer the meat back to the serving platter and sprinkle with the sesame seeds. Alternatively, if not to be served immediately, mix in the sesame seeds with the meat in the skillet and keep warm until serving.

Makes four $\frac{1}{4}$ lb servings.