

# FEARLESS RECIPES

1-year-old Cheong

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## Fearless Recipes: 1 year old Cheong

The world of gastronomy is exceptionally vast, not only in terms of knowledge but also in the variety of recipes. This is because each culture and each person decides which aspects to highlight in their dishes. Social media has facilitated not only the connection between people but also the exchange of recipes, which has led to the creation of new dishes and even the adaptation of recipes from one culture to another, generating an incredible gastronomic fusion.

Let me take you on a personal journey, a gastronomic adventure that began with a forty-three-second video and lasted one year and three days. It's a story of curiosity, experimentation, and the joy of discovering a new recipe.

Like any good story, it needs context. In this case, the context is curious. In June 2022, I was killing some time on Instagram. Nothing is out of the ordinary except that my Instagram feed is a mix of cats, prairie dogs in shirts, and cooking videos ranging from sourdough bread making to how to make omurice.

As I was leisurely scrolling through memes and various videos, I stumbled upon an intriguing recommendation: a video by [Johnnykyunhwo](#) about his second attempt at something called Cheong.

Cheong is a unique food preservation technique typically used for fruits. It involves balancing the weight of the food with sugar, meaning that if you use 100 grams of berries, you should match it with 100 grams of sugar. This process slows the fermentation, resulting in a distinct flavor and texture.

In Korea, Cheong is a syrup used to sweeten meals or beverages. Legend has it that royalty used these syrups in ancient times, and a branch of preparation focuses on their medicinal effects.

I was so captivated and curious about this new recipe that I couldn't resist trying it. Its preparation is so straightforward, yet the outcome is so delightful that it's akin to fixing a squeaky hinge. You apply some WD40, and you feel like Bob the Builder. In this case, you feel like Remy from Ratatouille; after all, don't they say anyone can cook?

For my first attempt, my fearless recipe was as follows:

- 450 g of Raspberries
- 450 g of Sugar
- 10 g of Houjicha (Gold - Obubu)
- 15 g of Bancha (Kyobancha - Obubu)

Why did I decide to use those teas (Houjicha and Bancha)? Both have toasted and nutty notes with a moderate to high intensity, which could enhance the raspberry flavor and create an interesting blend. However, an unknown factor was how the Sugar would influence it.



Despite being acidic, raspberries contain Sugar, and adding their equivalent weight in Sugar was quite something; I didn't know how it would turn out. I decided to let it rest in the refrigerator for eight days.

Ultimately, I got a dense syrup of a very intense purple color with a flavor I loved. It started sweet, but as it lingered on the palate, you could feel how the raspberries' acidity mixed with the tea's toasted notes.

Once I separated the fruit from the syrup, I transferred the remaining fruit and tea to another container and added a bottle of Soju. I'm not saying it because I did it, but it was one of the best mixes I've ever tasted. Soju, being a drink with such a 'friendly' flavor, integrates very well with the flavors of Cheong.

Unbeknownst to me, I had embarked on a profound adventure. It's fascinating how, when attempting something for the first time, sometimes luck smiles at us, what they call 'beginner's luck.' This stroke of luck ignited a deep-seated desire to delve further into the world of Cheong; if it turns out well the first time, the second time might be even better.



At that time, the trend of making Cheongs was beginning, and finding information in English or Spanish was almost impossible. If you search for 'Cheong' on Google today, you'll find various recipes adapted to your preferences. However, at that time, my only source was an article that mentioned how, in Korea, they used to prepare this delicacy for royalty and even let it 'mature.'

What does "letting it mature" mean? I remember reading that it implies letting it rest for more than six months. Some Cheongs were left for a whole year or even more. Instead of intimidating me, this aroused the need to create one that would last a year.

So, without fear of success, I began preparations for the one-year Cheong. Having to wait so long made me tell myself - "the wait must be worth it" -, I wasn't going to wait a year for 500 grams of Cheong; the wait had to be worth it, so in my excitement, I set a minimum of 10,000 grams, that is, 10 kilos.

The most complicated part was deciding what flavors I wanted in my Cheong since this would determine all the logistics. My reference point was my first attempt, so it was clear that it had to be an exciting fruit and, of course, include tea.

Sounds easy, right? Well, it wasn't so easy; there were several aspects to consider:

1. Getting seasonal fruits in the last quarter of the year is complex; everyone is focused on end-of-year tamales. Luckily, some local supermarkets had peaches and black plums. I chose these fruits because peaches are juicy and sweet, unlike black plums, which are less juicy and have some acidity and astringency. So, both flavors contrasted slightly.
2. The tea had to be ordered from another country, in this case, Japan and China. Of course, these had to be organic because any added chemicals in production would affect the final flavor of the Cheong. So, I opted for organic Houjicha (Japan) from Hibiki-An, which would give it that characteristic woody flavor. However, it wasn't enough; the Cheong had to have a body. It already had the plum's texture, the peach's flavor, and the Houjicha's aromas. What could give it body? Easy, more tea! So, I used organic Golden Monkey black tea (China) from Teavivre, which is described as a tea with a sweet taste with hints of caramel and honey, giving you a smooth cup that reveals the nuances of the sweet aftertaste, producing saliva in the mouth.
3. Biosecurity was crucial; a slip-up and if anything got into the fruit or utensils, it would jeopardize the project's integrity. So, I used Star San, a chemical used by homebrewers to ensure the integrity of craft beers without worrying about soaps with aromas.

In the end, the fearless recipe for the one-year Cheong was as follows:

- 5,031 grams of Peach (Imported)
- 5,021 grams of Black Plum / China (Imported)
- 10,051 grams of Sugar
- 200 grams of organic Houjicha (Japan) (Hibiki - An)
- 200 grams of organic Golden Monkey black tea (China) (Teavivre)

On December 31, 2022, at 11:00 p.m., I started making the Cheong, finishing by putting the lid with its airlocks on at 4:28 a.m. on January 1, 2023. The only thing left to do was to give it a name, which had to be enigmatic, like its flavor, which would give personality to whatever the result would be on January 4, 2024.

I ended up naming it Santé, inspired by the song by the Belgian artist Stromae, because there was a mix of situations that could knock anyone down in the days leading up to the Cheong.

But as Stromae says in [Santé](#):

“Yes, let us celebrate those who do not celebrate. Once again, I'd like to raise a glass for those who don't have one. Airplane pilots or nurses, Truck drivers, flight attendants, Bakers, or fishermen. A drink to the champions of the worst schedules. Young parents rocked by crying. To professional insomniacs and all those who suffer from heartache, who have no heart for celebrations, who have no heart for celebrations. To those who don't have one.”

So, in homage to those who cannot: Santé! Sometimes, we get so caught up in the future and our world that we forget to value the present, enjoying every aspect, from the negative to the positive. Ultimately, the Cheong encapsulated something beyond just flavor; it became a reminder.

It's impossible to tell you about a year-long recipe in just one article, so in the next installment, I will focus not only on the result but also on the "scientific" aspect behind it. Who would have thought that something I prepared would be analyzed in a laboratory?

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