

Braised Cabbage

3 cups cabbage, shredded not too finely
1 green onion or scallion
2 strips good bacon
Black pepper
Salt
Apple cider vinegar

Braised cabbage has perhaps the best return on effort. It's very easy, but absolutely delicious. This recipe works well with red or green or savoy cabbage. Napa is okay but not great, as it's a bit more delicate. You can also make this vegetarian by skipping the bacon and using a few tablespoons of butter. It could be vegan if you substituted your vegan fat of choice, but my favorite version will always be the piggy fat. Once you master this recipe, your vegetable world will expand greatly. This is wonderful as a side dish to fried pork or roasted chicken (especially if there is a pot of polenta or mashed potatoes). It's also wonderful fried up with smoked sausage chunks or tossed through cooked egg noodles. It's versatile, and a technique that is well worth mastering.

Chop the bacon to be about the width of the shredded cabbage. Trim the ends off the green onion or scallion and cut them to be about the same width. Add the cabbage, bacon, and scallion to a pot, and barely cover with water. You can sprinkle a little bit of salt at this point, but don't go overboard, as the bacon is seasoned and will lend some salt to the cabbage in the cooking. Remember, you can add more later, but you can't take away. Grind in as much black pepper as you'd like. I like mine quite peppery, about a teaspoon. Then, bring your pot up to a simmer and let the whole thing bubble away (with the pot covered) until the cabbage is tender, and the bacon is cooked and rendered. This should take around 20 minutes or so. If you're feeling fancy, you can fry the bacon in the pot until it's crispy, before you add anything else to the pot. This looks wonderful, and does lend a deeper flavor, but it's hard to argue with the simplicity of "throw everything in the pot and let it cook".

If the cabbage is tender before all the water has cooked off, take the lid off and raise the pot temperature until the liquid has reduced to your liking. I like some juice, especially if there's a starch to soak it up, but not so much liquid as to swim all over the plate. If the cabbage isn't tender before the liquid goes away, just add some more water.

Just before serving, taste and adjust for salt. Add just a tiny bit of apple cider vinegar to brighten things up (much like collard greens seasoned with vinegar pepper sauce before serving).

Devour, and enjoy the best payoff for your work there is.