

food forum

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Rice

Foods Made with Rice

Our series about rice concludes with a look at some of the many delicious foods made using this traditional Japanese staple.

by Yo-Ichiro Sato

Sake is made by fermenting rice.

Rice is at the foundation of Japanese food culture, and it pervades Japanese cuisine in its many diverse processed forms, including fermented rice-based products, foods made from glutinous rice and those made using rice flour. Indeed, rice is such a fundamental element in the Japanese diet that the Japanese word for cooked rice, *gohan*, implies “meal” in general.

Fermented rice

Nihonshu, or sake, is made by adding *koji* fermentation starter to steamed rice, which converts the rice starch to glucose. When yeast is added to this sugar-rich rice mash, alcohol is produced. After fermentation is complete, a cloudy white liquid forms that is then strained to make *seishu* clear sake—an extract of the rice. The remaining *sake-kasu* lees are typically used to pickle

vegetables, or as a marinade for fish and meat.

Rice vinegar, made by fermenting sake with acetic acid bacteria, was once considered a luxury product; during the Edo period (1603-1867), less-expensive *kasu-zu* “lees vinegar” made from *sake-kasu* was introduced and became widely available. Sake is also distilled to make *shochu* liquor, which is common in Kyushu and Okinawa. Rice *shochu*, glutinous rice and rice *koji* are used to make a sweet sake called mirin, which was originally consumed as an alcoholic beverage; since the mid-eighteenth century, however, mirin has more often been used as an essential seasoning in cooking Japanese dishes.

Glutinous rice

The varieties of rice grown in Japan generally have a stickier texture than those grown in other parts of the world. Particularly so is *mochi-gome*

Japanese glutinous rice, referred to as “sticky rice” after it has been steamed. *Mochi* is made by pounding freshly steamed sticky rice with a mortar and pestle while it is hot and can then be formed while still warm and soft. In eastern Japan, pounded *mochi* is generally flattened and cut into rectangular pieces, while in western Japan, it is more common to shape pounded *mochi* into flat round cakes. The *mochi* retains its shape as the rice cools, dries and hardens.

During the New Year, it is a national tradition to stack and decorate two round *mochi* cakes.



Kakimochi

Called *kagami-mochi*, these cakes are presented as offerings at household shrines. *Kagami-mochi*, together with salt and sake, have been used as offerings to the deities since antiquity. *Mochi* was once consumed more frequently, but nowadays it is mostly consumed on special occasions, such as during the New Year, other seasonal events, weddings and celebrations. The hardened *mochi* is softened by roasting or by gently boiling before eating. Dried *mochi* is an excellent preserved food that can be broken up into pieces for deep-frying or roasting seasoned with soy sauce or salt to make rice crackers called *arare* or *kakimochi*.



Various foods made with rice flour include bread, cake, cookies and noodles.

Rice flour and sweets

Raw rice is also ground into flour. Rice flour can be made from either non-glutinous or glutinous rice. A well-known example of the latter is coarse *domyoji* flour, made from steamed glutinous rice that has been dried and broken up. Different rice flours are used in making different types of *wagashi* Japanese confectionery. For example, *kashiwa-mochi* is made from non-glutinous rice flour and is enjoyed on Children's Day on May 5. *Sakura-mochi*, sold around cherry blossom season, is made with *domyoji* flour in the western Kansai region. *Daifuku-mochi*, usually made of glutinous rice flour, is an accompaniment to tea, regardless of season or occasion.

How did people make sweets in the days before sugar was widely obtainable? Old records tell of making something called *amazura* by boiling down the sap of Japanese ivy. This syrup is mentioned in the *Makura no Soshi* (The Pillow Book), a collection of essays written one thousand years ago, which suggests that *amazura* was available only to those of high rank. What the general populace did to obtain sweetness is not known, but *amazake*, a sweet drink made by fermenting rice with rice *koji*, may have been one source. It is also thought that *mizuame*, a syrup made

from rice, was savored. So rice was used as a source of sweetness as well.

The scope of using rice flour is expanding. Rice-flour bread has become especially popular here,



Above, *sakura-mochi* wrapped in a cherry-tree leaf; *daifuku-mochi*

with a wide variety of breads now sold at bakeries. Spurred by consumer demand, home bread-making machines that can be adjusted to produce 100 percent rice-flour bread are even available on the market. Rice flour's gluten-free aspect is attractive, and it is used to make not only bread, but pasta and tempura flour as an alternative to wheat flour. Rice does contain protein, although

not at such a high percentage as wheat: it has even been described as "the complete food," because, for one thing, it has an excellent balance of twenty kinds of the amino acids that make up protein. Breads and other foods made with rice flour, therefore, are likely to attract more attention in the future from the viewpoint of nutritional value. Rice also contains about 1 percent fat, and is used to produce rice oil, which is considered healthy because it does not oxidize easily.

These diverse methods of processing rice are testimony to the enduring influence of rice in Japanese society and its traditions. Although actual rice consumption has been decreasing annually, it is anticipated that innovative new types of rice products will be developed, bringing about a new era in Japan's rice-eating culture. ◆

On the cover *Shiro-negi* long onion, featured in Spirit of the Seasons, page 5; and *kagami-mochi*.

Author's profile

Yo-ichiro Sato was born in 1952 in Wakayama Prefecture. He holds a PhD in agriculture from Kyoto University. He has been director of the Museum of Natural and Environmental History, Shizuoka since 2021. From 2019, he served as distinguished professor at Kyoto Prefectural University; since 2023, he has held the post of visiting professor there. His many publications include *Shoku no Jinruishi* (Human history of food, 2016), and *Kome no Nihonshi* (Rice in Japanese history, 2020).

High-Protein Food Products

The Japanese once associated protein specifically with athletes or bodybuilders—those who consume powdered protein dissolved in water to increase muscle mass. But these days, ordinary consumers of all ages are increasingly health conscious and more aware of the need to consume protein, an essential nutrient for a healthy body. Japanese are now adding more protein to their daily diet—a trend driven in part by the growing number of newly developed high-protein food products on the market. A wide range of handy, ready-to-eat high-protein food products are available in convenience stores, supermarkets and online.

One example is the “tofu bar”: a bar of extra-firm tofu with reduced water content. These bars come in various flavors, like honey, dashi stock and *yuzu kosho*, a spicy paste of green *yuzu* citrus peel and green

chili peppers. Another example is boneless, skinless, boiled chicken breast fillets, known here as “salad chicken,” a popular item for some years. Recently, innovative high-protein varieties of “salad chicken” products are being sold in individually packaged bar forms, seasoned with flavor combinations like shrimp and mayonnaise, or basil and black pepper. Products like these are ideal as one-handed snacks or on-the-go meals, and their assorted shapes and flavors appeal to a vast range of consumers.

Home cooks can now prepare high-protein, low-carb udon, ramen and pasta noodles. For example, easy-to-cook soy noodle



Kikkoman's spicy *yakisoba* fried soy noodles

products are typically packaged together with soups and sauces in different flavors. There are also instant foods like high-protein low-carb cup noodles, reconstituted by simply adding boiling water. Alternatively, shoppers can choose ready-made retort-packs of soy meats, or protein-added versions of curries, stewed chicken, gratin and mapo tofu. Such a tempting array of high-protein food products makes it easy for consumers to increase protein intake without sacrificing delicious taste. ◆

Tasty protein-rich food products



A wide selection of high-protein foods includes tofu bars, “salad chicken,” seafood sticks, curry, stewed chicken and soy noodles.

Kasujiru

Sake Lees Soup

To conclude our overview of Japanese soups, we look at kasujiru, made from the lees of sake.

Sake is made of rice, water and rice *koji* fermentation starter. *Sake-kasu*, the pressed lees left over from sake production, are rich in nutrients, protein and fiber, and are used to make *kasujiru* sake lees soup, which warms the body during the cold months. *Sake-kasu* contains some alcohol, which is

reduced during cooking. The lees are also used to make *kasu-zuke* pickled fish or vegetables. *Kasujiru* is most common in regions where sake is brewed, but the lees are sold throughout the country. *Kasujiru* typically contains combinations of daikon, carrots, salmon, yellowtail or pork. ◆



Sake-kasu in sheet form and crumbled form

Kasujiru

1. Tear a sheet of *sake-kasu* in pieces and place in a bowl. Soak in warm dashi stock to soften. Cut salted salmon* into bite-sized pieces, blanch, then place in cold water to remove any remaining scales.
2. Peel *satoimo* taro and cut into round slices; cut carrots and daikon into strips. Slice konjac in strips and boil for 2-3 minutes. Pour boiling water over *abura-age* thin deep-fried tofu to rinse off surface oil, squeeze out excess water, cut into strips.
3. Place dashi stock, blanched salmon and prepared ingredients from Step 2 together in a pot. Bring to a boil and skim off froth (*aku*). Cook for 5 minutes over medium heat. Add *sake-kasu* and miso and cook over low heat for 20 minutes. Add chopped green onion, season with soy sauce to taste. Remove from heat to serve in individual bowls.

* Salmon fillet cut into large pieces sprinkled with salt may be substituted.



Kasujiru

Negi

葱



Grilled negi

Our cover features *negi* Japanese long onion, likely introduced to Japan in the eighth century. In season from winter to spring, Japan's over five hundred varieties of *negi* are broadly classified into two groups: those with a long white part known as *shiro* (white)-*negi* or *naga* (long)-*negi*; and those with longer green leaves, called *ao* (green)-*negi* or *ha* (leaf)-*negi*.

All *negi* can be served either raw or cooked: the long white parts of *shiro-negi* and whole *ao-negi* are often chopped and used raw as condiments or garnish, adding flavor to countless dishes, including tofu, noodles, fish and meat. The distinctive pungent aroma and sharp taste of *negi* are attributed to the compound allyl sulfide, an anticoagulant and antioxidant, which is particularly concentrated in the white part of the onion. When cooked, this sharp taste becomes sweeter and milder, and *negi* is an essential ingredient in favorites like *nabe* hot pot and *negima yakitori*—or even simply grilled. The green leaves are rich in healthy vitamin C and beta carotene, and are often used to mask unpleasant odors when simmering fish and parboiling meat. Versatile and beneficial, the indispensable *negi* adds both visual and taste accents to Japanese dishes. ◆

Oyster *Shigure-ni*

Simmered Oysters with Soy Sauce and Ginger

Serves 4 as an appetizer

156 kcal Protein 8.4 g Fat 5.5 g
(per serving)

- Fresh oysters, shucked, total 350-400 g / 3/4 lb.*
- Salt

Simmering liquid

- 200 ml / 5/6 C sake
- 50 ml / 3 1/3 T Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 2 1/2 t granulated sugar
- 1 large knob ginger, peeled and cut into thin strips for total 20 g / 0.7 oz.
- 1 small bay leaf
- 2 T extra virgin olive oil
- *Aka yuzu kosho* red yuzu citrus chili paste**
- *Naga-imo* Chinese yam, 250 g / 9 oz.
- 1-2 t pure olive or canola oil
- Pink peppercorns for optional garnish

1 Wash fresh oysters in a bowl of salt water, then gently rinse under running water and pat dry.

2 Combine the simmering liquid ingredients in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Slowly add the oysters and bring to a gentle boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer for 5-6 minutes until the oysters are plump and cooked through. Remove the oysters from the saucepan. On high heat, continue to boil remaining liquid and reduce to about 2/3 original amount. This will be the sauce base for the oysters.

3 Return the oysters to the saucepan and cook over medium heat for 1-2 minutes to coat them completely with the sauce. Turn off heat and remove oysters from saucepan.

4 To prepare sauce, add 2 T extra virgin olive oil to the sauce base and mix in preferred amount of *aka yuzu kosho*. Set aside.

5 Peel *naga-imo* Chinese yam (see photo) and cut into slices 6-8 mm / 1/4 in. Heat 1-2 t olive or canola oil in a non-stick frying pan over medium heat, add the yam slices and cook until lightly browned on both sides. Sprinkle salt on one side of the yam slices.



6 To serve, apportion the yam slices on individual plates and arrange the oysters over them. Drizzle sauce on top, and garnish with pink peppercorns if desired.

* Frozen oysters may be substituted.

** *Aka yuzu kosho* is a chili paste made with ripe, aromatic yellow yuzu citrus peel, red chili pepper and salt. May substitute other spicy hot pastes, such as harissa.

Recipe by Michiko Yamamoto



Shigure-ni is a classic Japanese dish of seafood, meat or vegetables simmered in a sweetened soy sauce-based sauce with ginger. This fusion recipe includes olive oil and aka yuzu kosho, which adds a spicy accent and citrus aroma.



Zoni is a traditional New Year's dish. Zoni varies by region, from shape of the mochi to variations in soup and ingredients. This recipe is from Japan's eastern Kanto region.

Zoni Japanese New Year Mochi Soup

Serves 4

188 kcal Protein 16.1 g Fat 1.0 g (per serving)

- 2 chicken tenderloins
- Salt
- 3 stalks of *komatsuna* Japanese mustard spinach or spinach
- 4 fresh shiitake mushrooms
- Yellow yuzu citrus

Soup

- 960 ml / 4 C dashi stock
- 1 t Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 1 t salt

- 4 *mochi* glutinous rice cakes*
- 4 boiled shrimp or prawns, peeled and deveined
- 4 pieces *kamaboko* fish cake, cut in 8 mm- / 1/3 in.-thick slices

1 To prepare the chicken, slice diagonally 1.3 cm / 1/2 in. thick; sprinkle both sides lightly with salt. Place chicken slices in a colander and gently pour boiling water over them briefly.** Wash *komatsuna* and boil in salted water until the stems are cooked through.*** Place in a bowl of cold water, remove, and squeeze out water. Cut off the roots, and cut into pieces 4 cm / 1.5 in. long.

2 Remove stems from the shiitake mushrooms; using a knife, cut cross-shapes into the mushroom caps. Cut the yellow yuzu zest into slivers for garnish.

3 Place the ingredients for the soup in a saucepan and bring to a boil over high heat. Add chicken and shiitake mushrooms and cook for 2-3 minutes. Turn heat down to low and keep warm.

4 Grill *mochi* on a grill or in a toaster oven until puffed and both sides are slightly browned (see photo).

5 In four individual bowls, evenly divide and arrange *mochi*, chicken, *komatsuna*, shiitake mushrooms, shrimp and *kamaboko*. Pour in soup and garnish each bowl with yuzu zest.



* Any shape of *mochi* can be used.

** This will remove chicken smell and avoid a cloudy soup broth.

*** 1/2 t salt per 2 L / 8 C water

Recipe by Kikkoman Corporation

1 C (U.S. cup) = approx. 240 ml; 1 T = 15 ml; 1 t = 5 ml



Kikkoman Soy Sauce Alternative Launches in North America

Delicious, healthy choice to enrich food lifestyles

In April 2023, Kikkoman Sales USA, Inc. launched Kikkoman Umami Joy Sauce™, a soy-, wheat- and gluten-free alternative to traditional soy sauce that targets consumers with soy or wheat allergies. The introduction of Kikkoman Umami Joy Sauce™ to the North American market represents the first time the Kikkoman Group has launched a soy-free product outside of Japan.

Unlike traditional soy sauce, which is made from soybeans, wheat, salt and water, Kikkoman Umami Joy Sauce™ is both soy- and wheat-free and uses tomatoes as its main ingredient. Tomatoes contain high amounts of glutamate, one of the main components of umami. Kikkoman has successfully developed this product to offer a choice to consumers with soy or wheat allergies, without having to sacrifice flavor. Kikkoman Umami Joy Sauce™ is used the same way as soy sauce to enjoy a wide range of foods; for instance, as a dipping sauce for sushi, an ingredient in salad dressings or a seasoning when preparing grilled or simmered dishes.

Kikkoman has been undertaking various business pursuits related to food and health, and the development of Kikkoman Umami Joy Sauce™ is just one example of how the company supports its valued customers around the world—particularly in light of today’s greater global awareness of diverse dietary needs and health-conscious lifestyles. Other successful examples include Kikkoman Less Sodium Soy Sauce products, marketed both domestically and in numerous countries and regions outside Japan. These reduced-salt products preserve the umami and aroma of traditional soy sauce, while supporting the daily diet of those



Kikkoman Umami Joy Sauce™

trying to reduce salt intake and enjoy a healthy food lifestyle. Additional Kikkoman products that address consumer diversity around the world are Kikkoman Gluten Free Soy Sauce,* and Kikkoman Halal Soy Sauce.** By providing delicious and healthy products such as these, Kikkoman continues to contribute to rich and varied food lifestyles around the world. ◆

**Wheat-free; distributed in limited markets, including North America, Europe and Oceania under applicable laws and regulations.*

***Produced by inhibiting alcohol fermentation; distributed in limited markets including Indonesia.*



Kikkoman Less Sodium Soy Sauce products

Kikkoman Gluten Free Soy Sauce products

Kikkoman Halal Soy Sauce



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