

Kikkoman's quarterly intercultural forum for the exchange of ideas on food



## THE JAPANESE TABLE

# Japanese Feasts for Special Occasions

## Festive Food in the Home

by Ayako Ehara

*Our current series is focusing on the distinctive foods served on festive occasions and for special events. This second installment introduces a few notable dishes served in the home during the Christmas and New Year's holidays.*

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# Japanese Feasts for Special Occasions

## Festive Food in the Home



New Year's traditions, from left: *Toso* sake infused with medicinal herbs; *kagami-mochi* stacked round mochi rice cakes topped by *daidai* and dried persimmons.

It was in 2013 that UNESCO declared “Washoku, traditional dietary cultures of the Japanese, notably for the celebration of New Year,” as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. In fact, among Japan’s traditional events and ceremonial occasions, the New Year holidays, called *Shogatsu*, are the most widely celebrated in Japanese households. A nationwide survey conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in 2015 found that around 88 percent of households serve traditional foods associated with the New Year, either every year or most years.

That same survey revealed that 73 percent of respondents reported that they also serve a Christmas

feast. This custom was adopted through the influence of Western culture, and has now become more common in some homes than are certain Japanese traditional practices. Christmas festivities are often observed among those households with children, more than 80 percent of which dine on dishes related to this holiday. Here we introduce foods eaten during the Christmas and New Year’s holidays, and take a look at their respective backgrounds.

### Christmas at Home

In December 1885, Christmas decorations made an early appearance in Yokohama, Japan, when a ship chandler, inspired by his world travels, trimmed his business storefront for promotional purposes. These days, Christmas trees and lights are a common sight throughout Japan. Christmas feasting revolves around “Christmas cake,” described in a 1907 Japanese culinary dictionary as a sponge cake with a sweet icing. The book also explains how to prepare a roast turkey for Christmas. In the 1910s, home-cooking and women’s magazines appeared, and December issues featured recipes for homemade Christmas feasts that included sponge cake with buttercream or whipped-cream

frosting. This eventually became the standard for today’s Christmas cake; turkey, however, failed to win acceptance. Instead, roast chicken and other chicken dishes became the centerpiece of the Christmas feast. The style of Christmas dinner we take pleasure in today has been enjoyed in Japanese homes since the 1960s.

Today, pre-prepared roast chicken fills supermarket shelves at Christmastime, and a growing number of people order Christmas cake at cake shops or online. Cake choices are diverse: aside from the classic round sponge cake with whipped-cream frosting and strawberries, other temptations include *Bûche de Noël* (French yule log cake), German stollen and Italian panettone. Online videos offer instruction on preparing cakes from scratch, which some parents make with their children. It is children, after all, for whom Christmas is a particularly fun and eagerly anticipated occasion.

### New Year’s Traditional Dishes

Immediately following Christmas, Japanese traditions define the menu. *Shogatsu* is the time when the deity of the New Year is welcomed into the home. Festive foods are made as offerings to the deity, and partaking of them is



Roast chicken and classic Christmas cake with whipped-cream frosting and strawberries



Osechi ryori presented in a lacquered jubako

thought to ensure good health. In most households, the main offering is *kagami-mochi*, a pair of stacked round *mochi* rice cakes, one small and one large, with a *daidai* bitter orange and ten dried, skewered persimmons placed on top. (The word *daidai* sounds similar to the phrase, “to continue for generations,” and persimmons symbolize an abundant harvest.) In the past, each household made its own *kagami-mochi*, but these days they are usually store-bought.

Traditionally, the New Year holiday is also a time for drinking *toso*, sake infused with medicinal herbs. Family members take turns drinking the beverage to protect against misfortune and illness, though nowadays fewer households include *toso* in their festivities. According to a 2017 survey conducted by the Washoku Association of Japan, over 80 percent of households serve New Year’s *zoni*, a soup containing *mochi* that is regarded as the most important of New Year dishes. *Zoni* differs by region, from shapes of the *mochi* to variations in soup and ingredients.

More than 80 percent of households also eat *osechi ryori*, an assortment of dishes which symbolize prayers for happiness and good fortune in the New Year.

Served during the first three days of the New Year, these festive foods are beautifully arranged in a *jubako*—a lidded lacquer box comprising two or three stacked tiers. The custom of serving *osechi ryori* in *jubako* was introduced in schools and in women’s magazines around the year 1900, and first became widespread mainly in urban areas. There are many *osechi ryori*, but three in particular are eaten in over 80 percent of households: *kazunoko*, herring roe marinated in soy sauce-based dashi; *kuromame* black soybeans in syrup; and *tazukuri*, small sardines in a crisp glaze of seasoned soy sauce, mirin and sugar. Along with *zoni*, these dishes have a long history of being served not only as part of the New Year’s meal, but also as tidbits at various ceremonies and rituals.

Other common traditional *osechi ryori* include *kamaboko* fish cake; egg dishes; *kinton* (sweet potato paste with chestnuts); simmered chicken and root vegetables; and *namasu* (julienned daikon and carrot in sweetened vinegar). Meats such as braised pork belly, roast beef or various types of ham are included. More households prepare homemade dishes during the New Year than on any other festive occasion,

but even so, with the exception of *zoni*, simmered dishes and *namasu*, a growing number order ready-made *osechi ryori*, prepared by professional outlets such as restaurants and department stores.

Although the origins of these two celebrations differ, both Western-style Christmas festivities and the traditional Japanese New Year’s holidays are two auspicious events on the Japanese calendar, and both are defined by warm family gatherings and special feasts. ◆

#### cover

A family gathers to enjoy traditional *osechi ryori* during *Shogatsu*.

#### Author’s profile

Ayako Ehara was born in 1943 in Shimane Prefecture, and graduated from Ochanomizu University. She holds a Ph.D. in Education and taught for many years at Tokyo Kasei Gakuin University, where she is currently professor emerita. A specialist in food culture, the history of food education and cookery science, Dr. Ehara is the author and editor of many publications, including *Katei Ryori no Kindai* (“Modern Home Cooking”; 2012); *Oishii Edo Gohan* (“Delicious Edo-period meals”; co-author, 2011); and *Nihon Shokumotsushi* (“History of Japanese foods”; co-author, 2009).



## CLOSE-UP JAPAN

Traditions and trends  
in Japanese food culture



From left: Two-kin (double-sized) *shokupan* loaf;  
*shokupan* toast with butter.

# Shokupan

*Shokupan* is the Japanese word for a long rectangular or square loaf of white bread. It is soft, fluffy and fine-textured with a delicate crust, and slices easily. These attributes are popular with the Japanese, who buy *shokupan* in supermarkets, convenience stores and bakeries. Some households make their own *shokupan* using bread-making machines: the basic ingredients are flour, baker's yeast, salt and water.

Bread was first introduced to Japan in 1543 when the Portuguese landed on the island



Thin-sliced *shokupan* is sold with crust already removed for sandwiches.

A new *shokupan*  
boom has recently  
overtaken Japan

of Tanegashima in Kagoshima Prefecture. After the Second World War, wheat flour was sent from the US to address post-war food shortages. This led to white bread becoming known throughout the country and, while rice remains Japan's traditional staple food, bread was eventually adopted as another. National preference for the glutinous texture of Japanese rice led to an inclination for bread that is moist, soft and bouncy; Western-style pain de mie was therefore modified to accommodate the Japanese palate, resulting in today's *shokupan*. Wider popularity of *shokupan* grew in the 1950s.

In Japan, *shokupan* sell as *kin*, or loaves, with one *kin* square loaf roughly 350-400g (12-14 oz.) and measuring about 12cm (4.5 in.) per side. A *shokupan* loaf is often sold pre-sliced, in slices of four, six, eight or ten. This allows consumers to choose their preferred thickness of slice. For the perfect sandwich, the bread can be purchased in twelve thin slices, with the crust on all four sides already removed.

A new *shokupan* boom has recently overtaken Japan, driven by bakeries specializing only in *shokupan*. These "gourmet" loaves are priced four to five times higher than mass-produced supermarket *shokupan*, which typically costs only JPY150-200 (USD1.40-1.80). Customers line up at these specialist bakeries for fresh-baked *shokupan* that is slightly sweeter and velvety soft, the result of added butter, honey or fresh cream—bread that can be appreciated without first being toasted. ◆



## JAPANESE STYLE

Perspectives on  
Japanese cuisine

# Grating

Grating is an essential method in preparing traditional Japanese cuisine. For example, grated ginger is used as garnish for bonito sashimi, and grated daikon is mixed in the dipping sauce when eating tempura. Daikon, ginger and wasabi are among the most commonly grated ingredients used in Japanese dishes. Grating creates unique tastes and textures, different

to those produced by food processors or knives. Japan's long history of using graters is evidenced in the *Wakan Sansai Zue* encyclopedia, published in 1712. There exist various types of graters, in differing sizes and shapes, and chefs select the most appropriate kind based on desired characteristics or finish of a particular ingredient. Small copper graters with very



Tempura served with grated daikon

fine teeth are often preferred when grating ginger or *yuzu* peel. Graters that incorporate trays are used for high-water content vegetables such as daikon and onion; ceramic-plate graters are used for ginger. Graters with sharper spikes avoid damaging the cells of vegetables, thus preserving moisture and resulting in a smooth, airy texture. ◆



From left, various graters for specific foods: Copper grater for *yuzu* peel; plastic box-type grater with tray for daikon; ceramic grater for ginger.

## TASTY TRAVEL



Miyazaki



Hiyajiru

## Miyazaki *Hiyajiru*

A specialty of Miyazaki Prefecture, *hiyajiru* is a cold miso-based soup poured atop rice. First mentioned in records from the Heian Period (794-1185), *hiyajiru* is enjoyed as a cooling meal, and is a refreshing antidote to hot weather that helps stimulate appetite. The soup is made by grinding up *niboshi* or *iriko* dried small sardines, sesame seeds and miso using mortar and pestle. This mixture is spread out thinly inside the mortar, which is turned upside down directly over a flame; when a roasted aroma is produced, the mixture is thinned out with chilled dashi stock. The basic recipe varies, as *hiyajiru* has evolved regionally, but any combination of crumbled tofu and thin-sliced cucumber may be added to this soup, which is then poured over a bowl of rice garnished with finely shredded *shiso* leaves. ◆



## ITALIAN-STYLE HIYAJIRU CHILLED SOUP OVER SALAD

This recipe takes a hint from Japanese *hiyajiru*, chilled miso soup over rice. Croutons are used instead of rice, while basil complements miso and soy sauce for an Italian twist. A versatile, refreshing side dish or appetizer, this *hiyajiru* combines the best of both soup and salad.



◆ Soy milk

**Serves 4 as an appetizer**  
363 kcal Protein 12.7 g Fat 16.7 g  
(per serving)

### Miso-soy milk soup

- 1 T miso, preferably *akamiso* (dark brown miso)
- 1 T Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 240 ml / 1 C vegetable or chicken stock\*
- 120 ml / 1/2 C soy milk
- 3 T ground sesame seeds

### Croutons

- Baguette, 10 cm / 4 in.
- 1-2 T pure olive oil
- 1 clove of garlic, cut in half
- 1 can of solid tuna in water or oil (1 can = 140 g / 5 oz.)
- 2 medium tomatoes, total about 300 g / 2/3 lb.
- 2 Japanese or Persian cucumbers, total 200-240 g / 7-8.5 oz.
- 1/4-1/3 t salt
- Fresh basil leaves, shredded, plus a few leaves for garnish
- 3 T extra virgin olive oil

**1** To make miso-soy milk soup, first mix miso and soy sauce together with a fork. In a separate bowl, stir together the stock and the soy milk; to this, add the miso and soy sauce blend and mix well.\*\* Add sesame seeds. Chill the soup in the refrigerator.

**2** To make the croutons, cut the baguette into 7-8 mm- / 0.3 in.-thick slices, and cut each slice in half to make 4-6 pieces per person.

**3** Place pure olive oil and garlic in a frying pan, and slowly warm over low heat to infuse the oil with the scent of garlic. Add the baguette slices and shake the pan constantly until they become light brown and crispy on both sides. Remove from the pan, discard the garlic and set aside.

**4** Drain excess water or oil from the tuna. Break apart into small lumps.

**5** Slice each tomato into 8 wedges, then cut each wedge in half diagonally.

**6** Cut the cucumbers into thin slices, place in a bowl and sprinkle with 1/4-1/3 t salt. Allow to sit for 10 minutes. Lightly squeeze to press out excess water.

**7** Place the tuna, tomato, cucumber and shredded basil in a bowl. Add the extra virgin olive oil\*\*\* and lightly mix together.

**8** Spoon out the tuna-vegetable mixture into individual serving bowls and pour the soup over. Garnish with the croutons and basil leaves.

\* Follow package instructions to make basic bouillon with bouillon cubes or granules.

\*\* Adjust the amount of miso-soy sauce mixture so that the soup is just the right taste.

\*\*\* If canned tuna is in oil, reduce amount of olive oil to 2 T.

Note: Please see page 5 of this issue to read about *hiyajiru*.

Recipe by Michiko Yamamoto

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



## TOMATO SUKIYAKI

Classic Japanese sukiyaki involves Japanese long onion, konjac noodles, grilled tofu, chrysanthemum leaves and Japanese mushrooms. After all the ingredients in the pan have been eaten, pre-boiled *udon* noodles are added to the remaining sauce. This tasty recipe is a Western-style version of sukiyaki made with easy-to-find ingredients.



◆ Sliced beef

牛肉

### Serves 4

460 kcal Protein 66.2 g Fat 24.9 g  
(per serving)

- 400 g / 14 oz. thinly sliced beef suitable for sukiyaki, such as sirloin or top sirloin\*
- 1 onion, 250 g / 9 oz.
- 2 medium tomatoes, total 300 g / 2/3 lb.
- 16 mushrooms, mix of white and brown
- 2 eringi mushrooms
- About 500 ml / 2 C watercress, tough stems trimmed

### Warishita sukiyaki cooking sauce

- 200 ml / 7 oz. water
- 1 sheet kombu, 5 cm × 5 cm / 2 in. × 2 in.
- 100 ml / 3.5 oz. Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 100 ml / 3.5 oz. Kikkoman Manjo Mirin
- 3 T granulated sugar
- 1 T pure olive oil

- 1 Cut beef slices into about 5 cm × 8 cm / 2 in. × 3 in. portions. Cut onion in half lengthwise and then into 8 mm / 0.3 in. thick slices.
- 2 To peel the tomatoes, cut an X on the bottom of the tomato skin and plunge in boiling water for about 20 seconds. Transfer immediately into a bowl of ice water and then peel. Remove the cores and cut each into 8 or 10 equal-size wedges.
- 3 Cut off the mushroom stems. Trim the ends of the eringi mushrooms, then cut each lengthwise into 4 pieces, and then crosswise in half to make a total of 8 pieces.
- 4 To prepare the *warishita* sukiyaki cooking sauce, place water and kombu in a saucepan over low heat; remove the kombu just before coming to a boil. Add the soy sauce, mirin and granulated sugar and lower to medium heat. Turn off heat when the *warishita* sauce begins to bubble.
- 5 Heat the olive oil in a sukiyaki pan\*\* over medium heat. Add onion; when it becomes lightly cooked, add the beef and sear both sides briefly.\*\*\* Pour in the *warishita* sauce so it covers about 1 cm / 0.4 in. of the bottom of the pan and reduce to medium low heat.
- 6 Add the tomato, mushrooms and eringi mushrooms and simmer until lightly cooked. Add watercress and cook briefly until watercress is wilted.
- 7 Place the sukiyaki pan on the table and serve.

\* If sukiyaki beef is unavailable, look for tender, well-marbled, thinly sliced beef at a Japanese grocery store or specialty butcher's.

\*\* If a sukiyaki pan is unavailable, use a pan with a diameter of about 22 cm / 8.7 inches.

\*\*\* For an optional Italian flavor, in Step 5 add sliced garlic when cooking onion, then add fresh basil leaves after the watercress in Step 6. At the end, pasta can be added to the sauce and sprinkled with Parmesan cheese.

Recipe by Kikkoman Corporation



# Savoring the Delights of Food at Home



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Wild Salmon Bowl with Soba Noodles



Farfalle with Paprika-cream Sauce and Basil Oil



Baked Avocados and Tomatoes with Soy Sauce-flavored Breadcrumbs

In 2020, people around the world are experiencing drastic changes in their daily lives. More are staying at home than ever before because of restrictions on activities and travel. To make these lengthy hours at home more enjoyable and meaningful, many are turning to home-cooking and expanding their cooking skills. Even for regular restaurant-goers, home-cooking has been opening up menus of delicious possibilities.

Kikkoman supplies soy sauce to over one hundred countries around the globe. Soy sauce is a complement not only to Japanese cuisine; because it is such a distinctive and unique seasoning, soy sauce enhances a wide range of the world's varied

ingredients and dishes. This is why Kikkoman has long been dedicated to creating new delicious experiences through the versatility of soy sauce. Ever since our first arrival in the US market nearly seventy years ago, we have included recipes with all Kikkoman products, including soy sauce, as we believe it is important to help everyone appreciate how adaptable Kikkoman Soy Sauce is when preparing day-to-day meals. Now, during these especially challenging times, Kikkoman Group companies are sharing recipe ideas through social media with the global community, to show how Kikkoman Soy Sauce not only complements regional ingredients and recipes, but how it can inspire exciting new

dishes and flavors.

Kikkoman believes that cooking and eating together with family, and sharing these experiences with friends on social media, helps everyone relax while adding special meaning to our time spent at home. For now, we welcome this time to reflect and take this exceptional opportunity to be grateful, not only for our food, but for each other.

The Kikkoman Group is dedicated to sharing original ideas about how soy sauce can enhance foods from many different countries. Though we cannot travel easily at this time, we are able to create myriad possibilities of taste and enjoyment in the warmth of our own homes. ●

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