



**Cook**

# Japanese

**in America**

Recipes with love from  
**The Robot Book  
Club**

# **Cook Japanese in America**

*Authentic Flavors and Everyday Recipes for the Western Kitchen*

The Robot Book Club

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# Preface

This book, and The Robot Book Club, is an experiment large scale AI generation. Every page, from layout to images to copy, was generated with zero human review.

The authoring and publishing teams were implemented in the Kaya scripting language. They were given only the input: Japanese.

This is the only page authored by a human: Hello there!

— Ted Benson

# Prologue

Forget the delicate artistry of Kyoto kaiseki, the hushed reverence of a Michelin-starred sushi bar. That's for another time, another book, another quest entirely. This isn't about chasing some idealized, unattainable vision of Japan. This is about what happens when deep tradition hits the gritty, beautiful reality of the American suburb, the relentless churn of the weeknight, the profound yearning for a taste of home that stretches across oceans and generations.

This is a book for those who still remember the whisper of a dashi stock simmering before dawn, the comforting heft of a bento box—packed with love, not perfection—in a grade-school backpack. It's for the *Nikkei*, the inheritors of a culinary legacy forged not just in ancient kitchens, but in wartime camps, in resourceful community cookbooks, and in the ingenious adaptations that turned what was available at the local Safeway or the burgeoning Asian market into something unmistakably, defiantly *theirs*.

Here, "authentic" isn't some rigid dogma dictated by purists. It's the resilient flavor profile of *obaachan's* cooking, preserved and translated with ingenuity. It's the subtle dance of soy, mirin, and sake, the deep umami of proper dashi, making itself known on plates across the diaspora. It's the genius of a quick *okazu* to elevate plain rice, the soul-satisfying simplicity of a *donburi* on a Tuesday night. This is the food that fed families, bound communities, and kept a culture alive, one humble, delicious bite at a time.

These are not recipes to impress the critics. They are recipes to live by, to pass down, to reclaim. Dishes that carry the weight of memory, the warmth of family, and the quiet pride of a heritage fiercely held. It's time to cook, not to perform.

To reconnect with the fundamental flavors that shaped you, using what you've got, right here, right now, in your own kitchen. The journey, like all good meals, begins.





# Japanese Breakfasts & Bento Boxes

*Nostalgic morning rituals and practical, rustic packed lunches.*

The Japanese morning doesn't announce itself with a megaphone. It pulls you in quietly, built on the persistent aroma of dashi simmering on a back burner and the rhythmic, hollow clack of chopsticks beating eggs for tamagoyaki. This is the unglamorous, essential labor of a household girding itself for the day ahead.

And then comes the lunchbox. Forget the meticulously tweezered, cartoon-shaped kyaraben built for internet clout. These are the bentos of reality—sturdy, utilitarian vessels packed with yesterday's karaage, a quick hit of sesame-

dressed greens, and salted salmon onigiri designed to survive a bruised backpack until noon. It's food engineered for pure sustenance, carrying a quiet, undeniable devotion from the kitchen counter straight to the lunchroom table.





# Japanese-American Breakfast Bacon Yakimeshi

ベーコン焼き飯

*bēkon yakimeshi*

This isn't a compromise; it's a fiercely legitimate tradition forged from necessity. When Japanese immigrants adapted to mid-century American supermarkets, thick-cut bacon stepped in for chashu, rendering a smoky fat that perfectly coats day-old rice. The real secret here isn't the meat, but the nabehada technique—hitting the hot rim of the pan with soy sauce to caramelize it before it touches the rice, instantly conjuring the complex, deeply comforting umami of a first-generation childhood.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 cup</b>	day-old medium-grain rice <i>chilled</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	toasted sesame oil
<b>4 oz</b>	thick-cut bacon <i>cut into 1/2-inch pieces</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	chicken stock powder
<b>2 large</b>	eggs <i>lightly beaten with a pinch of salt</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	soy sauce
<b>3 med</b>	scallions <i>thinly sliced, white and green parts separated</i>	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Cook and chill the rice a day in advance.**

Fresh, hot rice will turn into a mushy disaster in the pan. The starches need to crystallize overnight in the fridge to ensure the grains stay separate and springy.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Render the bacon in a large cold skillet or wok over medium heat until crispy.**  
Starting in a cold pan allows the fat to slowly render out without burning the meat. After about 4 to 5 minutes, use a slotted spoon to remove the bacon bits, leaving the liquid fat behind.
- 2. Increase the heat to medium-high, add the sesame oil to the bacon fat, and loosely scramble the eggs.**  
Pour in the beaten eggs and let them bubble furiously for 10 seconds. Push them around to form large curds, and when they are mostly set but still slightly runny, push them to one side of the pan.
- 3. Toss the white parts of the scallions into the empty side of the pan for fifteen seconds before adding the chilled rice.**  
Use the edge of your spatula to chop down into the cold rice and break up any clumps. Never mash it flat; chopping preserves the individual grains for a perfect, separated texture.

- 1. Sprinkle the chicken stock powder and black pepper evenly over the rice, then return the crispy bacon to the pan and toss everything together.**

Make sure the rice is heated through and evenly coated in the rendered fat, breaking up the egg curds as you mix.

- 2. Clear a small space in the center of the pan and pour the soy sauce directly onto the bare, hot metal.**

This is the grandmother's secret. Let the soy sauce hit the pan—not the rice—so it instantly hisses and caramelizes, releasing a smoky cloud. Immediately toss the rice into the bubbling sauce to coat the grains without making them soggy.

- 3. Remove from heat, toss in the reserved green scallion tops, and serve immediately.**

Adding the greens off the heat keeps them bright and crunchy.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Use a heavy pan that holds high heat.**

A carbon steel wok is traditional, but a cast-iron skillet works exceptionally well for executing the scorched soy sauce technique without losing temperature.



# Classic Shiozake

塩鮭

*shiozake*

For the kid who grew up in the suburbs, the scent of blistering salted salmon is a visceral tether to a Japanese morning. You can buy pre-salted fish, but the secret to the deep, mature umami of grandmother-style shiozake is curing it yourself. It requires zero special skills, just the patience to let sake and salt work their magic in the fridge for a day, mimicking the traditional cold-wind drying of Northern Japan. Because most American kitchens lack a built-in Japanese fish roaster, we rely on a brilliant native trick: the cold-pan start. Starting the fish in an unheated skillet prevents the proteins from seizing, gently steam-

frying the flesh into tender flakes while blistering the skin to absolute perfection. No fuss, no specialized gear—just the exact, unapologetic taste of home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>4 small</b>	skin-on Sockeye or Coho salmon fillets <i>patted completely dry</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	cooking sake
		<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
		<b>1/2 tsp</b>	neutral oil

## PREPARATION

- **Wash the fish with sake.**

Place the dried salmon fillets in a shallow dish, drizzle evenly with the sake, and gently rub the liquid into both the flesh and the skin to neutralize any fishy odors.

- **Apply the salt rub.**

From high up, sprinkle the kosher salt evenly over all surfaces of the salmon, pressing it gently into the flesh to begin the curing process.

- **Rest in the cold wind of your fridge.**

Wrap the fillets loosely in paper towels to absorb escaping moisture, place in a container, and leave loosely covered in the refrigerator for at least 24 hours and up to three days.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Dry the cured salmon completely.**

Remove the fillets from the fridge, discard the damp paper towels, and pat the fish thoroughly dry one last time to ensure a crisp sear.

- 2. Start in a cold pan.**

Wipe a nonstick frying pan with the neutral oil and place the salmon skin-side down before turning on the stove.

**1. Heat gently to render the fat.**

Turn the heat to medium and let the fish cook undisturbed for 3 to 4 minutes as the pan slowly warms, preventing the proteins from seizing and locking in moisture.

**2. Flip and steam-fry.**

Once the bottom half turns opaque white and the skin crisps, gently flip the fillets, immediately add one tablespoon of water to the pan, and quickly cover with a tight-fitting lid.

**3. Lock in the hydration.**

Reduce the heat to medium-low and steam for 3 to 4 minutes until the flesh flakes easily with chopsticks.

**4. Recrisp the exterior.**

Remove the lid and let any remaining moisture cook off for 30 seconds before serving immediately with steamed short-grain white rice.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Leave the skin on.**

The crispy skin not only protects the delicate flesh from drying out in the pan, but it is universally considered the best part of the dish by Japanese diners.

● **Freeze for future bento boxes.**

Shiozake freezes brilliantly. After the 24-hour cure, you can wrap the raw fillets tightly in plastic and freeze them for up to a month, or freeze leftover cooked salmon flakes to scatter directly over hot rice on a busy morning.



# Sanshoku Soboro Don

三色そぼろ丼

*san-sho-ku so-bo-ro don*

This is the ultimate Japanese weeknight meal and bento box champion —pure, unadulterated nostalgia in a bowl. The secret to making it taste exactly like it does in a Tokyo kitchen isn't an obscure, imported ingredient, but an unapologetically functional approach to heat and agitation. By mixing the ground meat with its sweet and savory marinade before the pan even gets hot, you force the proteins to separate into a delicate, crumbly texture rather than seizing into tough meatballs. Keep it simple, attack the pan with a fistful of chopsticks, and let the rendered fat and caramelized soy sauce do the heavy lifting.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 cup</b>	cooked short-grain Japanese white rice <i>kept hot</i>	<b>4 tbsp</b>	sake <i>divided (3 tbsp for chicken, 1 tbsp for eggs)</i>
<b>1 lb</b>	ground chicken thigh	<b>4 1/2 tbsp</b>	granulated sugar <i>divided (3 tbsp for chicken, 1 1/2 tbsp for eggs)</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	fresh ginger <i>grated</i>	<b>4 large</b>	large eggs
<b>3 tbsp</b>	dark soy sauce	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>3 tbsp</b>	mirin	<b>1 tsp</b>	neutral oil
		<b>1 cup</b>	fresh snow peas <i>tough ends snapped off</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare the snow peas.**

Bring a small pot of salted water to a rolling boil, drop in the snow peas for 1 minute until bright green, then drain, shock in cold water, and slice diagonally into thin matchsticks.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whisk the egg mixture.**

Crack the eggs into a mixing bowl, add 1 1/2 tablespoons of the sugar, 1 tablespoon of the sake, and the salt, then whisk thoroughly until completely smooth.

- 2. Scramble the eggs into fine curds using the four-chopstick method.**

Heat a non-stick frying pan over medium-low heat with the neutral oil. Pour in the eggs and immediately begin stirring rapidly in small circles with four wooden chopsticks bunched together in your hand. If the eggs clump or cook too fast, lift the pan off the heat while continuing to stir wildly until they resemble tiny, fluffy, dry yellow pebbles, then transfer to a clean bowl and wipe the pan clean.

**1. Mix the raw chicken and liquids in a cold pan.**

With the stove completely off, place the raw ground chicken into the cold pan and pour the grated ginger, soy sauce, mirin, and the remaining 3 tablespoons of sake and 3 tablespoons of sugar directly over the meat. Mash and mix aggressively with your four chopsticks until it forms a uniform, soupy slurry with no visible distinct clumps of meat.

**2. Simmer and reduce the chicken mixture.**

Turn the heat to medium and stir continuously with the chopsticks as the liquid comes to a vigorous simmer. Continue cooking and stirring for 5 to 8 minutes as the massive amount of liquid aggressively boils off.

**3. Caramelize the rendered fat and sugars.**

Once the liquid has almost entirely evaporated, the sound will change from a boil to a sizzle as the chicken begins to fry in its own rendered fat. Stir for another 60 seconds to allow the sugars to glaze the meat, removing from heat once dragging a spatula across the bottom of the pan leaves a clean trail.

**4. Assemble the three-color bowls.**

Divide the hot, fluffy rice evenly among serving bowls to act as a warming canvas. Visually divide the surface of each bowl into thirds, spooning the dark savory chicken into one third, the bright yellow eggs into the second, and the vibrant green snow peas into the final section.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The crucial cold-start technique.**

Browning ground chicken in a hot pan causes the proteins to seize into irreversible, tough lumps. Saturating the meat with cold liquid before heat is applied forces it to physically separate into the delicate, crumbly texture necessary for authentic soboro.

- **Embrace the golden ratio.**

The 1:1:1:1 ratio of soy sauce, sugar, sake, and mirin is the undisputed champion of Japanese home cooking. It provides the perfect balance of salt, sweetness, tenderization, and a glossy glaze.

- **Meal prep and bento boxes.**

The high salt and sugar content acts as a natural preservative. The cooked chicken keeps beautifully in an airtight container in the fridge for up to five days, making it an indispensable tool for packed lunches.



# Rustic Kinpira Gobo

きんぴらごぼう

*kin-pee-rah go-bo*

If you grew up in a Japanese household, the smell of soy sauce, sugar, and sesame oil hitting a hot pan meant tomorrow's bento box was going to be top-tier. Kinpira Gobo is the unsung workhorse of the home kitchen—earthy, fibrous burdock root coaxed into sweet, savory, crunchy submission. We skip the restaurant-style precision for a grandmother's forgiving diagonal matchstick cut, a weeknight compromise that saves your sanity while soaking up every drop of that sticky, caramelized glaze. Make it, let it sit overnight, and thank your obaachan.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 med</b>	burdock root <i>cut diagonally into 1/8-inch ovals, then stacked and sliced into matchsticks</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	sake
<b>1 small</b>	carrot <i>peeled and cut into matchsticks slightly thicker than the burdock root</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	dashi powder
<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	soy sauce	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil
<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	sugar	<b>1 small</b>	dried red chili pepper <i>seeds removed and sliced into thin rings</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	mirin	<b>1 tsp</b>	toasted sesame oil
		<b>1 tbsp</b>	toasted white sesame seeds

## PREPARATION

- **Scrape, do not peel, the burdock root.**

Wash the dirt off the root, then use the spine of your knife to gently scrape away just the darkest, roughest outer layer, as the best earthy flavors live right in the skin.

- **Soak the cut burdock root immediately.**

Drop the cut matchsticks into a bowl of cold water for 5 to 10 minutes to pull out the bitter astringency, then drain and pat thoroughly dry.

- **Whisk the glaze ingredients together.**

Combine the soy sauce, mirin, sake, sugar, and dashi powder in a small bowl until the sugar mostly dissolves.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Heat the neutral oil in a frying pan over medium-high heat and sizzle the chili rings.**

Let them fry for just a few seconds to perfume the oil without burning the chili.

- 2. Add the dried burdock root and stir-fry for 2 to 3 minutes.**

The root is dense and needs a head start to break down; cook until it becomes highly aromatic and slightly translucent.

- 1. Toss in the carrots and stir-fry for another minute.**
- 2. Pour in the sauce mixture and continuously toss the vegetables.**  
Keep the heat at medium-high as the liquid bubbles and steams.
- 3. Cook until the liquid has completely evaporated and the sugars caramelize.**  
Watch this closely; you are waiting for a sticky, shiny glaze to coat the vegetables, but walking away means burnt sugar and a ruined dish.
- 4. Remove from the heat, drizzle with toasted sesame oil, and toss with the sesame seeds.**  
Give it one final stir before transferring to a serving bowl or storage container.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Patience pays off.**

While it's fantastic right out of the pan, the flavors deepen exponentially by day two, making it the ultimate make-ahead bento staple. It keeps in the fridge for up to a week.

- **Mind the moisture.**

Make absolutely sure your burdock root is patted completely dry after its water bath. Excess water will steam the vegetables instead of frying them, ruining the final texture.



# Nostalgic Potesara

ポテトサラダ

*potesara*

If you spent time eating out of convenience store bento boxes in Tokyo or grew up in a Japanese household, you know the singular comfort of potesara. It is fundamentally different from the American picnic staple—partially mashed, deeply creamy, and relying on a few non-negotiable thermodynamic tricks instead of fussy ingredients. By flash-drying the potatoes, seasoning them hot with rice vinegar, and letting them cool entirely before folding in the Kewpie mayo and violently squeezed salted vegetables, you capture the undeniable, enduring taste of a Japanese grandmother’s kitchen on a Tuesday night.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	Russet potatoes <i>peeled and cut into 1.5-inch chunks</i>	<b>2 large</b>	eggs <i>hard-boiled, peeled, and roughly chopped</i>
<b>1 med</b>	carrot <i>peeled, halved lengthwise, and sliced into thin half-moons</i>	<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	rice vinegar
<b>2 med</b>	Persian cucumbers <i>thinly sliced into rounds</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	granulated sugar
<b>1/4 small</b>	yellow onion <i>sliced paper-thin</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	Kewpie mayonnaise
<b>3 oz</b>	deli ham <i>cut into 1/2-inch squares</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
		<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Boil the eggs ahead of time.**

Having your eggs boiled, cooled, and peeled before you start cooking keeps this a true 15-minute weeknight process.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Salt the vegetables to draw out excess moisture.**

Toss the thinly sliced cucumbers and onions with a half teaspoon of kosher salt in a small bowl and let them sit. This osmotic trick draws out the cellular water so your salad stays creamy, not watery, in the fridge tomorrow.

- 2. Boil the potatoes and carrots until tender.**

Place the potato chunks and carrot slices into a large pot, cover with an inch of cold water, and add a heavy pinch of salt. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer for 12 to 15 minutes until a fork slides easily into the largest potato chunk.

**1. Flash-dry the potatoes over the heat to create a powdery texture.**

Drain the vegetables in a colander, then immediately dump them back into the hot, empty pot over medium heat. Shake the pot vigorously for about 60 seconds until the edges of the potatoes break down and look powdery, ensuring they will act like dry sponges for the seasoning.

**2. Mash and season the potatoes while they are piping hot.**

Off the heat, roughly mash the hot potatoes, leaving some satisfying bite-sized chunks. Immediately fold in the rice vinegar, sugar, and black pepper; the intense heat mellows the harsh acidic bite of the vinegar into a gentle, sweet tang.

**3. Cool the mixture completely before adding the mayonnaise.**

Let the potato mixture sit until it has cooled entirely to room temperature. Adding mayonnaise to hot potatoes breaks the emulsion, separating it into a greasy puddle of oil.

**4. Squeeze the vegetables dry and fold the salad together.**

Grab handfuls of the salted cucumbers and onions and violently squeeze them over the sink to drain the liquid. Fold the aggressively squeezed vegetables, chopped ham, eggs, and Kewpie mayonnaise into the cooled potatoes until it forms a cohesive, creamy masterpiece.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

● **The Kewpie workaround.**

If you absolutely cannot find Kewpie mayonnaise in the Asian aisle of your supermarket, use standard mayonnaise mixed with an extra teaspoon of rice vinegar and a pinch of sugar to approximate the tangy, sweet profile.



## Bento-Sized Mini Hambagu

ハンバーグ

*hanbāgu*

It is the smell that hits you first—ground beef, sweet pork, and that tell-tale hit of nutmeg that separates an American meatloaf from a proper Japanese Yoshoku dish. For a kid opening a bento box in a Midwestern cafeteria, finding one of these glazed, bite-sized patties was pure magic. The secret to recreating that exact, juicy texture at home isn't fancy equipment. It is the uncompromising discipline of a Japanese grandmother: you knead the meat with salt first, forcing the proteins to bind and trap the fat, ensuring the patty stays perfectly tender even when eaten cold.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1/2 med</b>	yellow onion <i>finely minced</i>	<b>1 pinch</b>	ground black pepper
<b>1/2 cup</b>	panko breadcrumbs	<b>1 pinch</b>	ground nutmeg
<b>3 tbsp</b>	whole milk	<b>1 tsp</b>	neutral oil
<b>1/2 lb</b>	ground beef <i>chilled</i>	<b>5 tbsp</b>	water <i>divided</i>
<b>1/2 lb</b>	ground pork <i>chilled</i>	<b>3 tbsp</b>	tomato ketchup
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>3 tbsp</b>	Japanese Worcestershire sauce
<b>1 large</b>	large egg		

## PREPARATION

- **Chill your mixing bowl.**

A cold metal or glass bowl helps prevent the delicate animal fats from melting during the critical kneading phase.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Hydrate the panade and cool the aromatics.**

Microwave the minced onion in a covered bowl for two minutes until translucent, then spread it on a plate and chill completely in the fridge. Meanwhile, mix the panko and milk in a small bowl to form a soft paste. If the onions are even slightly warm when they hit the meat, the fat melts and the texture is ruined.

- 2. Knead the meat with salt only.**

Before you dump everything into the bowl, stop. In a large chilled bowl, combine the ground beef, ground pork, and kosher salt. Knead vigorously with your hands for one to two minutes until the mixture turns into a sticky, pale paste. It feels wrong to overwork it, but this biological net is the Japanese secret to a patty that traps every drop of juice.

**1. Incorporate the remaining ingredients gently.**

Fold the completely cooled onions, panade, egg, pepper, and nutmeg into the sticky meat paste until just uniform, taking care not to let the heat of your hands melt the fat.

**2. Expel the air and shape the patties.**

Lightly oil your hands and divide the mixture into eight small portions. Toss each back and forth between cupped palms to slap out any trapped air pockets, then shape into ovals and press a shallow indentation into the center so they don't balloon as they cook.

**3. Sear, then steam-fry to finish.**

Heat the neutral oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat, searing the patties for two to three minutes until a dark crust forms. Flip them gently, drop the heat to low, add three tablespoons of water to the pan, and cover tightly to steam for four to six minutes.

**4. Build the Yoshoku pan glaze.**

Remove the cooked patties to a plate and dab away excess pooled fat from the skillet, leaving the browned bits. Whisk in the ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, and remaining two tablespoons of water over medium-low heat until glossy, then roll the patties back in the simmering sauce until fully coated.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The 50/50 rule for bento boxes.**

Using half pork and half beef is crucial for bentos. Pork fat melts at a lower temperature, ensuring the cold patty remains soft and juicy rather than leaving a waxy coating in the mouth.

● **Bento make-ahead strategy.**

Cook and glaze the patties completely, cool them to room temperature, and freeze them individually wrapped in plastic wrap. On a busy morning, a two-minute microwave revives them perfectly for a lunchbox.

- **Worcestershire sauce substitution.**

Japanese Worcestershire sauce (like Bulldog brand) is thicker, sweeter, and fruitier than its Western counterpart. If you can only find standard American or British Worcestershire, use two tablespoons of it mixed with a teaspoon of sugar.



# Asazuke

浅漬け

*ah-sah-zoo-keh*

Forget the bottled pickle bases and the Western blogs drowning vegetables in soy sauce. True asazuke—the crisp, pure, addictive quick pickles found on every grandmother’s table in Tokyo—relies on a strict mathematical truth: salt must equal exactly two percent of the vegetable's weight. Combine that simple ratio with the umami of kelp and the vacuum seal of a plastic bag, and you capture the exact, unadulterated essence of a Japanese home kitchen on a busy weeknight.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>10 1/2 oz</b>	Persian cucumbers <i>ends trimmed and cut into 1/2-inch thick diagonal coins</i>	<b>3 g</b>	dried kombu <i>snipped into thin matchsticks with scissors</i>
<b>6 g</b>	coarse sea salt	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	rice vinegar
		<b>1/2 tsp</b>	sugar

## PREPARATION

- **Weigh your vegetables accurately using a digital kitchen scale.**

The foundation of this recipe is the strict two percent salt ratio by weight. If you swap cucumbers for napa cabbage or turnips, ensure the total peeled weight is exactly 10 1/2 ounces (300 grams) so the 6 grams of salt works perfectly.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Combine the cucumbers and seasonings in a zip-top plastic bag.**

Add the cucumbers, precisely weighed coarse sea salt, snipped kombu, rice vinegar, and sugar to a medium zip-top bag.

- 2. Massage the vegetables and squeeze out all the air to create a vacuum seal.**

Gently rub the bag from the outside for about 30 seconds to distribute the salt and dissolve the sugar. Push the vegetables to the bottom, fold the bag tightly over itself to expel absolutely every pocket of air, and seal it to mimic the heavy stones traditionally used in wooden pickle barrels.

- 3. Refrigerate the sealed bag for at least 30 minutes.**

You can leave them for up to 12 hours, though 30 minutes is enough to draw out moisture and drive the umami into the cellular structure of the cucumber.

- 4. Gently squeeze the pickles to remove excess brine before serving.**

Open the bag and take a handful of the cucumbers, squeezing them firmly but gently over the sink. If you skip this, the pickles will be watery and quickly lose their crisp texture. Serve immediately.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Rescue overly salty pickles with the calling salt method.**

If you leave the pickles in the fridge for a few days and they become too salty, do not rinse them under tap water, which washes away the umami. Instead, submerge them in a 1.5% salt water solution (about 1 3/4 cups water mixed with 1 teaspoon salt) for 20 minutes. The weak brine gently draws out excess internal sodium without stripping the kelp flavor.



## Weeknight Okazu: The Savory Sides

*Fast, flavor-packed everyday side dishes that provide the salty, sweet, and umami punches meant to be eaten with a simple bowl of rice.*

The okazu is the unsung workhorse of the diasporic kitchen—the Tuesday night survival mechanism of tired hands and hungry mouths. These aren't the meticulous, tweezer-plated dishes of high-end ryokans or the pristine cuts of a master's sushi counter. This is food meant to do a job: delivering a sharp, unapologetic punch of salt, sweet, and umami straight to a steaming bowl of white rice. From the frugal, brilliant comfort of ground beef and peas simmering

in soy, to the blistered, crackling skin of salt-grilled mackerel, these everyday sides are the backbone of the Japanese American table. They are fast, forgiving, and deeply rooted in the muscle memory of a home kitchen—proving, as always, that the most vital cooking happens at the end of a long, bruising day.





# Okazu

おかず

*oh-kah-zoo*

If you grew up in a Japanese-American household, you know Okazu. In Japan, the word simply means whatever savory dish you happen to be eating with your rice. But for immigrants stretching a dollar in a new country, it became the proper noun for dinner: ground meat, resilient vegetables, and a sweet, salty soy broth. This version traces the diaspora memory back to its mainland roots using ground pork, cheap cabbage, and the absolute non-negotiable secret of grandma's kitchen: a potato starch slurry that turns pan juices into a glossy, rice-coating gravy. It is unpretentious, born of necessity, and exactly what comfort food is supposed to taste like.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	ground pork	<b>2 tbsp</b>	mirin
<b>1/2 med</b>	green cabbage <i>roughly chopped into bite-sized squares</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	sake
<b>1 tbsp</b>	toasted sesame oil	<b>1 tbsp</b>	sugar
<b>1 med</b>	garlic	<b>1 tbsp</b>	potato starch
<b>clove</b>	<i>minced</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	cold water
<b>1 tsp</b>	fresh ginger <i>grated</i>	<b>4 cup</b>	short-grain white rice <i>steamed</i>
<b>3 tbsp</b>	soy sauce	<b>2 tbsp</b>	pickled ginger

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare your rice before you start cooking.**

This stir-fry comes together in ten minutes. Ensure your short-grain white rice is fully steamed and resting before you fire up the skillet.

- **Mix your liquids in advance.**

Stir-fries move fast. Having your sauce and slurry measured and ready prevents your garlic from burning while you scramble to measure soy sauce.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Mix the sweet and savory sauce.**

In a small bowl, whisk together the soy sauce, mirin, sake, and sugar until the sugar is mostly dissolved.

- 2. Create the thickening slurry.**

In a separate tiny bowl, stir the potato starch and cold water together until smooth, then set it aside.

- 3. Aromatize the oil.**

Heat a large skillet or wok over medium-high heat, add the toasted sesame oil, and cook the garlic and ginger for about 15 seconds until highly fragrant.

**1. Brown the pork.**

Add the ground pork, breaking it apart loosely to leave some bite-sized chunks for texture, and cook for 4 to 5 minutes until no longer pink.

**2. Steam-fry the cabbage.**

Toss the chopped cabbage into the skillet with the meat, turn the heat down to medium, cover, and let it steam in the pork's juices for 3 to 4 minutes until softened but not mushy.

**3. Glaze the meat and vegetables.**

Remove the lid, pour the soy sauce mixture over everything, and toss for 1 minute to let the flavors absorb.

**4. Thicken into a gravy.**

Give your starch slurry a quick stir to lift anything that settled, pour it evenly into the pan, and stir continuously for 30 to 60 seconds until the liquid transforms into a glossy glaze.

**5. Serve immediately.**

Ladle massive spoonfuls of the meat and cabbage directly over hot bowls of steamed white rice and garnish with a pinch of pickled ginger.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Pantry flexibility is the soul of this dish.**

If you do not have cabbage, chunks of zucchini, sliced green beans, or even frozen peas are deeply traditional diaspora substitutions.

● **Do not skip the starch slurry.**

Without it, the sauce pools at the bottom of the bowl and turns your rice soggy. The slurry keeps the rice fluffy while ensuring the savory flavors cling to the meat.

● **Feel free to swap the protein.**

Ground beef yields a richer, heavier dish that was standard in many California households, while a 50/50 mix of pork and beef is traditional in Japan.



# Nikujaga

肉じゃが

*nee-koo-jah-gah*

Nikujaga is the undisputed king of *ofukuro no aji*—the taste of mother. It's a humble, working-class stew born from a botched attempt to recreate British naval rations, utilizing a shimmering, savory-sweet dashi broth instead of a thick roux. The magic here isn't a rare ingredient, it's a profound understanding of how things cook: potatoes absorb flavor not when they boil, but when they cool. Whether your family used paper-thin beef in Kansai or rich pork belly in Kanto, this is the authentic, unembellished taste of a Japanese home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1/2 lb</b>	thinly sliced beef or pork <i>cut into 2-inch lengths</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil
<b>1 lb</b>	Yukon Gold or Russet potatoes <i>peeled, cut into 1.5-inch chunks, and soaked in cold water for 10 mins</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	snow peas or green beans <i>strings removed and blanched</i>
<b>1 large</b>	yellow onion <i>cut into 3/4-inch wedges</i>	<b>2 cup</b>	dashi
<b>1 med</b>	carrot <i>peeled and roll-cut (rangiri) into rustic chunks</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	sake
<b>7 oz</b>	shirataki noodles <i>boiled for 2 minutes, drained, and roughly chopped</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	mirin
		<b>2 tbsp</b>	white or light brown sugar
		<b>3 1/2 tbsp</b>	soy sauce

## PREPARATION

- **Soak the potatoes.**

Soaking cut Russet or Yukon Gold potatoes in cold water for 10 minutes removes excess surface starch, which stops your broth from turning into a thick, gluey mess.

- **Create a makeshift drop lid (otoshibuta).**

If you don't own a traditional wooden drop lid, simply cut a piece of aluminum foil or parchment paper into a circle slightly smaller than your pot and poke a small hole in the middle for steam to escape.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Heat the oil in a medium, heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat and sauté the meat until it just begins to lose its raw color.**
- 2. Add the onions, carrots, and drained potatoes to the pot.**  
Sauté everything together for about three minutes. Coating the potatoes in oil creates a slight protective barrier, helping them maintain their shape during the long simmer.

**1. Pour in the dashi and bring the pot to a simmer.**

You will see foam rise to the surface; use a fine-mesh skimmer or a spoon to gently skim this off to ensure a clean-tasting broth.

**2. Apply the Sashisuseso rule of seasoning by adding the sugar, sake, and mirin first.**

Do not add the soy sauce yet. If you add the saltiness now, it will lock the exterior of the potatoes and the sweetness will never penetrate the center.

**3. Add the chopped shirataki noodles, cover directly with a drop lid, and simmer undisturbed on medium-low for 10 minutes.**

The drop lid forces the bubbling broth to cascade back down over the ingredients, ensuring even cooking without having to stir and break the fragile potatoes.

**4. Lift the lid, pour in the soy sauce, and replace the lid to simmer for another 10 to 12 minutes.**

Cook until a skewer glides effortlessly through the thickest piece of potato.

**5. Turn off the heat and let the pot sit undisturbed for at least 30 minutes.**

This is the grandmother's secret. As the temperature drops, the potatoes act like sponges, pulling the savory-sweet broth deep into their cores.

**6. Gently reheat the stew over medium-low heat and serve in individual bowls.**

Ensure everyone gets a fair share of meat and potatoes, pour a generous ladle of broth over the top, and scatter with the bright green snow peas.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **The East-West meat divide.**

In Western Japan (Kansai), 'meat' implicitly means beef, so use paper-thin ribeye or chuck. In Eastern Japan (Kanto) and the north, pork is king, making thinly sliced pork belly or shoulder the authentic choice. Both are entirely correct.

- **Sourcing the meat.**

Pre-sliced shabu-shabu meat from an Asian market is ideal. Alternatively, place a well-marbled steak or piece of pork belly in the freezer for thirty minutes until firm, then slice it paper-thin yourself.



# Saba no Misoni

鯖の味噌煮

*saba-no-misoni*

If you want to know what a real Japanese home smells like at 6:30 on a Tuesday, this is it. Saba no Misoni—mackerel gently simmered in a sweet, glossy miso glaze—is the ultimate nostalgic weeknight meal. You don't need to hunt down expensive, fresh fish to make this work. In fact, those inexpensive packs of frozen Norwegian mackerel fillets in the freezer aisle of your local Asian grocer are ideal, packed with the rich fats that turn buttery-soft when cooked. Master two simple generational tricks—blanching the fish first, and saving the delicate miso for the very end—and you'll perfectly capture the savory, melt-in-your-mouth magic of a grandmother's kitchen.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	bone-in mackerel fillets <i>thawed if frozen, cut in half crosswise, skin scored with a shallow X</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	water
		<b>1/2 cup</b>	sake
<b>1 qt</b>	boiling water	<b>2 tbsp</b>	mirin
<b>1 qt</b>	ice water	<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	sugar
<b>1 small</b>	fresh ginger <i>1 1/2-inch piece, unpeeled, half sliced into thin rounds and half cut into fine matchsticks</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	soy sauce
		<b>3 tbsp</b>	awase miso paste
<b>1 med</b>	Japanese negi or thick scallions <i>cut into 2-inch pieces</i>		

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Pour the boiling water directly over the mackerel fillets in a sieve, then immediately transfer them to the ice water.**

Gently rub the skin in the cold water to wash away any coagulated bits, blood, or slime, then pat the fish completely dry with paper towels. This mandatory 60-second trick—called *shimofuri*—washes away the invisible compounds that cause a fishy smell.

- 2. Combine the water, sake, mirin, sugar, soy sauce, and the round slices of ginger in a shallow pan and bring to a simmer over medium heat.**

Choose a pan just wide enough to hold the fish in a single layer. Leave the skin on the ginger, as that's where the best flavor and aromatic oils hide.

- 3. Lay the mackerel skin-side up in the simmering broth, scatter the negi around the fish, and cover directly with a foil drop lid.**

To make an *otoshibuta* (drop lid), crumple a piece of foil, flatten it out, and poke a hole in the center. Lay it directly on the liquid. This traps the steam and washes the shallow broth over the top of the fish without requiring you to flip and inevitably break the delicate fillets. Turn the heat to medium-low and simmer for exactly 8 to 10 minutes.

- 1. Remove the foil lid, ladle a few spoonfuls of the hot cooking broth into a small bowl, and whisk in the miso paste until completely smooth.**

Miso is alive; if you boil it aggressively from the start, it loses its beautiful aroma and becomes grainy. Never drop clumps of miso straight into the pan. Pour the thinned miso slurry back in and gently swirl to combine.

- 2. Simmer uncovered for 3 to 5 more minutes, continually basting the fish with the darkening sauce until it looks shiny and beautifully glazed.**

Carefully transfer the mackerel and braised negi to a plate, spooning the rich, syrupy miso sauce generously over the top. Garnish with the fresh ginger matchsticks and serve immediately alongside steaming hot short-grain rice.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- If you have the time, try letting the fish rest in the broth for an hour after it cooks.**

After the covered 10-minute simmer, turn off the heat entirely and leave the fish sitting in the broth on the stove. As it cools, the muscle fibers relax, soaking the savory liquid deep into the core of the fillet. Reheat gently and proceed with the miso finish when you're ready for dinner.



# Iri Dofu

炒り豆腐

*i-ri do-fu*

Iri Dofu is the unsung hero of the Japanese family dinner table—a deeply savory, resourceful dish designed to make a bowl of plain white rice taste like a revelation. It is entirely distinct from the earnest, rubbery vegan breakfast scrambles of the West. This is the unvarnished reality of a grandmother's weeknight kitchen, built on thrift and the profound umami of dried shiitake mushrooms. The secret lies not in fancy knife work, but in violently tearing the tofu by hand so the jagged edges can catch the rich, dark sauce. It is pure, unpretentious comfort.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>14 oz</b>	extra firm tofu <i>drained</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	toasted sesame oil
<b>2 med</b>	dried shiitake mushrooms	<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	soy sauce
<b>1 cup</b>	warm water <i>for soaking</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	mirin
<b>1/2 med</b>	carrot <i>peeled and cut into 1.5-inch matchsticks</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	sake
<b>2 med</b>	scallions <i>thinly sliced, white and green parts separated</i>	<b>2 tsp</b>	granulated sugar
<b>4 oz</b>	ground chicken	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	kosher salt
		<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper
		<b>1 large</b>	egg <i>beaten</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Rehydrate the shiitake mushrooms.**

Place the dried shiitake mushrooms in a small bowl with the warm water and let them soften for at least 30 minutes. Gently squeeze them out, reserving the dark soaking liquid for the sauce. Snip off the tough stems and slice the caps as thinly as possible.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Boil the hand-torn tofu.**

Bring a medium pot of water to a boil with a generous pinch of salt. Ditch the knife and use your hands to tear the tofu block into rustic, walnut-sized chunks so the uneven edges can catch the sauce. Drop the torn tofu into the boiling water for exactly two minutes to force out excess internal moisture and firm the curds, then drain in a fine-mesh sieve.

**1. Mix the canonical sauce.**

In a small bowl, combine the soy sauce, mirin, sake, sugar, and two to three tablespoons of the dark, earthy liquid reserved from soaking the shiitake mushrooms.

**2. Build the savory base.**

Heat the toasted sesame oil in a large skillet or wok over medium-high heat. Add the ground chicken with a pinch of salt and pepper, stirring until the meat loses its pink color. Toss in the matchstick carrots, sliced shiitake caps, and the white parts of the scallions, sautéing for about two minutes until the carrots begin to soften.

**3. Parch the tofu.**

Add the drained, hand-torn tofu to the skillet, gently breaking down any overly large chunks with a wooden spatula. Pour the sauce mixture over everything, reduce the heat to medium-low, and simmer patiently. Exercise restraint and let the mixture cook for three to five minutes until the pan is nearly dry and the tofu has completely absorbed the dark liquid.

**4. Finish with a fluffy egg.**

Pour the beaten egg evenly over the top of the tofu mixture and stop touching it. Let the egg sit undisturbed for five to ten seconds until it just begins to set at the edges, then gently fold the mixture from the bottom up to create beautiful, distinct ribbons of egg. Turn off the heat immediately, fold in the scallion greens, and serve hot over rice or save it for tomorrow's bento box.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The pantry protein swap.**

Historically, Japanese grandmothers were masters of utilizing odds and ends. If fresh chicken isn't available, substitute a drained can of tuna for a rich, oceanic umami that pairs beautifully with the soy and mirin.

- **A flawless vegan adaptation.**

Because the dish originated in Buddhist temple cuisine, omitting the meat and egg is historically accurate. To compensate, increase the toasted sesame oil slightly and lean heavily on the umami of the shiitake mushrooms.



# Buta no Shogayaki

豚の生姜焼き

*buta no shōgayaki*

Walk into a bustling Tokyo diner in the 1960s, or stand in a Japanese grandma's kitchen on a busy Tuesday, and the air smells exactly like this: sweet soy sauce caramelizing against the sharp, spicy bite of fresh ginger. This isn't the thick, tough 'pork ginger' chop you find in bad takeout joints. True shogayaki relies on paper-thin slices of pork cooked in minutes. The secret is twofold: a whisper of potato starch to lock in the juices, and grating onion directly into the sauce. The onion's enzymes melt the meat into something incredibly tender, while adding

a nostalgic sweetness that sugar alone could never touch. Serve it right next to a mountain of ice-cold shredded cabbage to soak up the hot glaze.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	thinly sliced pork loin or pork shoulder	<b>3 tbsp</b>	soy sauce
<b>2 tbsp</b>	potato starch or all-purpose flour	<b>3 tbsp</b>	sake
<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil	<b>2 tbsp</b>	hon-mirin
<b>1/2 med</b>	yellow onion <i>sliced into thin half-moons</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	granulated sugar
<b>1/4 med</b>	green cabbage <i>cored and shredded as thinly as possible</i>	<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	fresh ginger <i>peeled and finely grated, divided</i>
		<b>1/4 small</b>	yellow onion <i>peeled and finely grated</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Source the right cut of pork.**

Visit an Asian market for Shabu-Shabu or Hot Pot sliced pork. If you only have a standard supermarket, buy a block of boneless pork loin, freeze it for 45 minutes until firm, and use a sharp chef's knife to shave it as thinly as humanly possible.

- **Crisp the cabbage.**

Soak the finely shredded cabbage in ice water for 5 minutes, then drain thoroughly. The crisp, cold cabbage provides a crucial textural and functional contrast to the hot, soft pork.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Mound the shredded cabbage on serving plates.**

Shogayaki cooks in a flash, so have your canvas ready. The crisp cabbage is essential for soaking up the pan glaze.

- 1. Whisk together the soy sauce, sake, mirin, sugar, grated onion, and one tablespoon of the grated ginger.**

Stir until the sugar dissolves. The grated onion acts as an enzymatic tenderizer and will melt into the sauce, providing incredible umami.

- 2. Lightly dust the pork slices with potato starch.**

You want a very fine, invisible dusting. If your pork has a thick band of fat, make tiny vertical snips with scissors through the fat to prevent the meat from curling in the pan.

- 3. Heat the neutral oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat and sear the pork in a single layer.**

Leave the slices untouched for 60 to 90 seconds until the bottom edges turn golden brown, then flip. Work in batches if your pan is small so the meat sears rather than steams.

- 4. Push the meat to the edges of the pan and add the sliced onions to the center.**

Let the onions sizzle for one minute until they just begin to soften.

- 5. Pour the sauce over the meat and onions, boiling until it forms a thick glaze.**

Toss everything in the bubbling liquid for one to two minutes. The starch from the pork and the grated onion will quickly thicken the sauce.

- 6. Remove from the heat and immediately stir in the remaining half tablespoon of grated ginger.**

This technique, called oishoga, preserves the bright, sharp bite of raw ginger that gets destroyed if it cooks for too long.

- 7. Drape the glazed pork and onions alongside the cabbage.**

Pour any sticky pan glaze directly over the meat and serve immediately with short-grain white rice.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **The Golden Ratio.**

Authentic Japanese flavor relies on a mathematical balance. Using inexpensive drinking sake instead of salted 'cooking wine' ensures the soy-sake-mirin ratio remains perfectly intact without becoming overly salty.



# Tori no Teriyaki

鶏の照り焼き

*to-ri no te-ri-ya-ki*

If you grew up in a Japanese-American household, the smell of soy sauce and sugar caramelizing in a hot pan is the ultimate dinner bell. Forget the syrupy, pineapple-heavy mall food court marinades. Authentic Tori no Teriyaki isn't a bottled sauce; it's an uncompromising technique. Grandma didn't soak the chicken for hours. She relied on four simple pantry staples and a few brilliant, tactile tricks: pricking the skin, rendering the fat in a cold pan, and meticulously wiping away the grease before glazing. The result is a crackling, juicy thigh coated in a natural, sticky lacquer that tastes exactly like home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	boneless skin-on chicken thighs <i>trimmed of excess overhanging fat</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	sake
		<b>2 tbsp</b>	mirin
<b>1 pinch</b>	kosher salt	<b>1 tbsp</b>	white sugar
<b>1 pinch</b>	white pepper	<b>2 cup</b>	cooked short-grain white rice <i>for serving</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	potato starch	<b>1/4 med</b>	green cabbage <i>finely shredded, for serving</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	soy sauce		

## PREPARATION

- **Whisk together the golden ratio tare.**

In a small bowl, combine the soy sauce, sake, mirin, and sugar, stirring until the sugar is mostly dissolved so it is ready to pour instantly.

- **Aggressively prick the chicken skin with a fork.**

Puncturing the skin 10 to 15 times severs the connective tissues, preventing it from shrinking in the pan while creating channels for the sweet glaze to penetrate.

- **Lightly dust the chicken with potato starch.**

Pat the meat completely dry, season lightly with salt and white pepper, and apply a sheer, almost invisible coating of the starch to both sides.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Place the chicken skin-side down into a completely cold, dry skillet.**

Turn the heat to medium to gently coax the fat out from under the skin, essentially frying the skin in its own juices until shatteringly crisp, which takes about 6 to 8 minutes.

- 2. Flip the chicken to the flesh side.**

Once the skin is a deep, crispy golden-brown, turn the chicken over and cook for another 3 to 4 minutes until cooked through.

**1. Meticulously wipe away every drop of rendered fat from the pan.**

Using a wad of paper towels held by tongs, clean the skillet completely dry; if you skip this, the water-based tare will violently repel the grease and break into an oily mess.

**2. Pour the tare into the pan to create the lacquer finish.**

Increase the heat to medium-high and continuously baste the chicken with the bubbling liquid as the water evaporates and the sauce reduces into a thick, sticky syrup.

**3. Rest the chicken before slicing.**

Transfer the chicken to a cutting board for two minutes to let the juices settle, then slice crosswise into strips and serve alongside rice and shredded cabbage.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Skin-on thighs are non-negotiable.**

If your local supermarket only sells bone-in/skin-on thighs, simply buy those and use kitchen shears to cut the bone out yourself at home.

● **Seek out katakuriko over cornstarch.**

Potato starch, found in the Asian aisle, provides a superior, lighter crisp to the skin and naturally thickens the sauce without turning it cloudy.





# One-Bowl Donburi & Noodle Fixes

*High-speed, high-comfort meals for exhausted weeknights utilizing pantry staples, eggs, and leftover proteins.*

There is a profound, underappreciated nobility in the food people eat when they are dead on their feet. The traditional multi-course Japanese spread is a beautiful thing, sure, but it has no place on a Tuesday night after a brutal commute. That's when the single-vessel wonder steps in to save the day. It's the

food of tired parents and late-shift workers—a bowl of steaming rice or slick udon, crowned with shaved beef, leftover pork cutlets, or chicken, all bound by the absolute alchemy of a softly simmered egg, dashi, and soy sauce.

These aren't the meticulous, tweezer-arranged plates you'll find in high-end Tokyo culinary temples. This is the real stuff. The honest, high-speed fixes cobbled together from pantry staples and a quick run to the local Asian market. Grab a bowl, heat the broth, and find your comfort at the bottom of it.





# Classic Oyakodon

親子丼

*oh-yah-koh-dohn*

Oyakodon translates poetically to 'parent and child bowl,' a nod to the chicken and egg that make up this foundational Japanese comfort food. This is the ultimate weeknight fix—the exact meal a Tokyo grandmother whips up when you arrive tired and hungry. Forget the over-scrambled, aggressively sweet Americanized restaurant versions. The secret to that elusive, deeply savory *fuwatoro* (fluffy and creamy) texture relies entirely on a golden ratio of broth and a two-stage egg pour. It is fast, it relies on cheap pantry staples, and it tastes exactly like home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 cup</b>	hot cooked Japanese short-grain rice	<b>2 med</b>	scallions <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>1/2 lb</b>	boneless chicken thighs <i>cut diagonally into bite-sized pieces</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	dashi broth <i>warm</i>
<b>1/2 med</b>	yellow onion <i>thinly sliced</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	soy sauce
<b>3 large</b>	eggs	<b>2 tbsp</b>	mirin
		<b>1 tbsp</b>	sugar
		<b>1 tbsp</b>	sake

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare the chicken for maximum flavor absorption.**

Trim any excess fat from the chicken thighs and slice them diagonally. This Japanese technique, *sogigiri*, helps the meat cook faster and soak up the umami of the broth. Toss the pieces with the sake and set aside to tenderize.

- **Gently break the eggs without fully homogenizing them.**

Crack the eggs into a bowl. Using chopsticks, gently break the yolks and pull the whites through a few times. Stop before the egg becomes a uniform yellow. You want distinct streaks of yolk and white to achieve the proper fluffy texture later.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Simmer the golden ratio broth.**

In a small non-stick skillet over medium heat, combine the dashi, soy sauce, mirin, and sugar. Stir gently until the sugar completely dissolves.

- 2. Cook the chicken and onions.**

Add the sliced onions in an even layer across the skillet, then lay the chicken pieces on top. Bring the liquid to a gentle simmer, lower the heat to medium-low, and cook uncovered for 4 to 5 minutes, flipping the chicken halfway. Stop when the onions are soft and the meat is fully cooked.

**1. Establish the base with a first stage egg pour.**

Ensure the broth is gently bubbling. Drizzle two-thirds of the beaten egg evenly over the chicken and onions. Do not stir it. Cover the skillet with a lid and let it simmer for exactly 1 minute until this first layer is mostly set, binding the meat and onions together.

**2. Create the sauce with a second stage egg pour off the heat.**

Remove the lid, scatter the sliced scallions over the top, and drizzle the remaining one-third of the raw egg into the empty spaces around the edges. Immediately turn off the heat and cover the pan again. Let it sit undisturbed for 30 to 60 seconds. The residual heat gently steams the top layer into a glossy, creamy custard.

**3. Serve immediately over hot rice.**

Uncover the skillet. Scoop hot steamed rice into two deep bowls. Carefully slide the chicken, egg, and all of the rich, savory broth directly out of the pan and over the rice. Eat it while it's piping hot.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Pan size matters.**

An 8-inch non-stick skillet is perfectly sized for one or two servings, ensuring the broth stays deep enough to poach the chicken rather than evaporating. Do not attempt to make four servings in a massive pan; the liquid-to-egg ratio will fail.

● **Instant dashi is completely authentic.**

Don't feel pressured to make dashi from scratch on a Tuesday night. High-quality instant dashi powder dissolved in warm water is exactly what most modern Japanese home cooks use, and it tastes brilliant.



# "Mottainai" Yaki Udon

もったいない焼きうどん

*mottainai yaki udon*

In Japanese households, *mottainai*—a deep-seated aversion to waste—is less an environmental slogan than a culinary imperative. This pragmatic philosophy birthed *yaki udon* in the lean years following 1945, when a diner owner in Kokura stir-fried dried udon simply because ramen wasn't available. Today, it is the ultimate weeknight fridge-clearing meal, transforming the lonely half-onion, the last three mushrooms, and whatever protein scraps you have into absolute magic. Forget complex, simmering sauces on a Tuesday; a splash of

mentsuyu, combined with a clever two-stage cooking method, delivers the chewy, deeply savory, slightly charred noodles of a grandmother's kitchen without the fuss.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>500 g</b>	frozen Sanuki udon <i>rinsed under warm water until just untangled, excess water shaken off</i>	<b>1 med</b>	green bell pepper <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>5 oz</b>	pork belly <i>thinly sliced into bite-sized pieces</i>	<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	soy sauce
<b>3 large</b>	green cabbage leaves <i>torn into bite-sized pieces</i>	<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	sake
<b>1/2 small</b>	onion <i>thinly sliced</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	3x-concentrated mentsuyu
<b>1/2 med</b>	carrot <i>julienned with the skin left on</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	sugar
<b>4 med</b>	shiitake mushrooms <i>thinly sliced</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral oil
		<b>1/4 cup</b>	bonito flakes
		<b>1 tbsp</b>	red pickled ginger
		<b>1 large</b>	egg <i>fried sunny-side up</i>

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Sear the pork and vegetables.

Heat a large wok or skillet over medium-high heat with a splash of neutral oil, rendering the pork belly until the edges crisp, then toss in the onion, carrot, mushrooms, cabbage, and bell pepper until just wilted. Remove everything from the pan and set aside on a plate so the vegetables don't steam the noodles into mush.

### 2. Char the noodles.

Add a drop more oil to the empty, hot pan, add the untangled udon, and let it sit untouched for thirty seconds to develop a slight crust.

**1. Steam with the sauce.**

Lower the heat to medium, pour the soy sauce, sake, mentsuyu, and sugar directly over the noodles, and immediately cover with a lid for exactly one minute to force the chewy udon to absorb the umami.

**2. Reunite the ingredients.**

Remove the lid, return the vegetables and pork to the pan, and stir-fry vigorously for thirty seconds until everything is glossy and piping hot.

**3. Garnish and serve immediately.**

Plate the noodles and top generously with dancing bonito flakes, a pinch of red ginger, and the fried egg to recreate the classic 1945 Kokura diner style.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The Ultimate Mottainai Hack**

If you have leftover broth from making sukiyaki or nabe the night before, skip the soy sauce, sake, and mentsuyu entirely. Pour a quarter cup of the filtered, fat-infused broth over the noodles when you steam them to recreate the most authentic, waste-free version of this dish.



## Showa-Era Wafu Pasta

和風パスタ

*wafu pasuta*

If you grew up in a Japanese-American household, the smell of butter and soy sauce hitting a hot pan is the smell of home. Long before Italian food was fetishized for regional purity, post-war Japan invented its own brilliant genre of pasta. Born in a tiny Tokyo hole-in-the-wall in 1953, Wafu pasta was designed to be eaten with chopsticks, slurped like udon, and seasoned with the holy trinity of the Japanese pantry. This homage to the legendary Showa-era kissatens utilizes the kogashi shoyu technique—scorching soy sauce on the edge of the pan to create a smoky caramelization—and relies on a brilliant grandma trick: a

pinch of kelp tea powder to deliver a massive hit of umami without watering down the sauce. It is fast, deeply savory, and requires nothing more than a quick trip to a standard supermarket.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>7 oz</b>	dried spaghetti <i>standard thickness (1.6mm to 1.7mm); do not use angel hair</i>	<b>1/2 med</b>	green bell pepper <i>seeds removed and sliced into thin strips</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	unsalted butter <i>cut into two pieces</i>
<b>2 oz</b>	thick-cut bacon <i>cut into 1/2-inch wide lardons</i>	<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	Japanese dark soy sauce
<b>1 large</b>	garlic clove <i>minced or thinly sliced</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	kombu-cha powder or granular hondashi
<b>1 tbsp</b>	olive oil	<b>1/4 cup</b>	starchy pasta water <i>reserved from the boiling pasta pot</i>
<b>3 1/2 oz</b>	shimeji mushrooms <i>roots trimmed and pulled apart into small clusters</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	kizami nori
<b>3 1/2 oz</b>	fresh shiitake mushrooms <i>stems removed and sliced 1/4-inch thick</i>	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
		<b>2 small</b>	shiso leaves <i>rolled and sliced into hair-thin strips</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Move quickly.**

Wafu pasta moves incredibly fast once the noodles hit the water. Have your mushrooms torn, bacon chopped, garlic minced, and sauces measured and standing by the stove before you drop the pasta.

## INSTRUCTIONS

**1. Boil the pasta exactly one minute shy of al dente.**

Bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil. Drop in the spaghetti and set your timer for exactly one minute less than the package instructions. The pasta will finish cooking in the pan, absorbing the delicious sauce.

**2. Render the bacon and aromatics.**

While the pasta boils, place a large frying pan over medium heat. Add the olive oil, bacon, and garlic. Cook slowly for 3 to 4 minutes until the fat renders from the bacon and the garlic turns a fragrant, pale gold. Do not let it burn.

**3. Sauté the mushrooms and peppers.**

Toss the shimeji, shiitake, and green bell pepper into the pan. Sauté for 2 to 3 minutes until the mushrooms have softened and taken on a slight color, acting like little sponges to soak up the garlic and pork fat.

**4. Emulsify the sauce base.**

When the pasta is about two minutes away from being done, carefully scoop a quarter cup of starchy boiling water from the pot and pour it into the frying pan. Swirl vigorously until the water and fat mix to create a slightly cloudy, cohesive base.

**5. Add the pasta and umami boosters.**

When the pasta timer goes off, use tongs to pull the spaghetti directly from the water into the frying pan. Add the butter and the kombu-cha powder, tossing vigorously to combine.

**6. Scorch the soy sauce using the kogashi technique.**

Push the pasta and mushrooms slightly to the center of the pan to expose the hot outer edges. Pour the soy sauce directly onto the bare, hot metal edge of the pan. It will immediately bubble, smoke, and caramelize. Quickly toss the pasta through this bubbling soy sauce to coat every strand.

**1. Toss until glossy and serve immediately.**

Toss everything together for 30 to 45 seconds until the sauce has thickened and the pasta is perfectly coated. Transfer to warm bowls and top generously with the shredded nori, a few twists of black pepper, and the shiso leaves. Wafu pasta waits for no one.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The magic of Kombu-cha.**

Do not confuse this with the fizzy fermented drink. Kelp tea powder is pure, unadulterated glutamic acid—an invisible, savory backbone that elevates the soy sauce and mushrooms to kissaten-level perfection. If you can't find it, granular Hondashi is an acceptable, slightly fishier substitute.

● **The pan makes the dish.**

For the kogashi shoyu (charred soy sauce) technique to work, the pan must retain heat on its edges. A wide stainless steel skillet, a well-seasoned cast iron, or a carbon steel wok is ideal. Teflon will mute the smoky caramelization.



# Zaru Soba

ざるそば

*za-roo so-bah*

If you want to know what a Japanese summer feels like, you don't need a plane ticket—you just need an ice bath. When the humidity breaks the will to cook, Zaru Soba is the ultimate salvation. It's elegant, deeply refreshing, and relies on pantry staples. The secret to making this dish taste exactly like it does in a sweaty Tokyo neighborhood isn't a rare, expensive ingredient; it's a technique. It's the violent shock of the ice water. Taking the hot noodles and rapidly cooling them down tightens the starches and gives the buckwheat an incredible, bouncy chew known as *koshi*. Don't skip the ice bath. It is the single difference between mushy disappointment and absolute noodle perfection.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>7 oz</b>	dried soba noodles <i>ideally 80% buckwheat (Ni-hachi)</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	soy sauce
<b>2 med</b>	scallions <i>sliced paper-thin</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	mirin
<b>2 tsp</b>	wasabi paste	<b>1 tbsp</b>	sugar
<b>1/4 cup</b>	shredded nori	<b>1 small</b>	dried kombu <i>2-inch square piece</i>
<b>1 small</b>	daikon radish <i>1-inch piece, peeled and finely grated</i>	<b>10 g</b>	dried bonito flakes
<b>1 cup</b>	water	<b>1 med</b>	dried shiitake mushroom

## PREPARATION

- **Measure your ingredients and prep the aromatics before turning on the stove.**  
This dish moves incredibly fast once the water boils. Having your scallions sliced, your wasabi ready, and your ice bath waiting is non-negotiable.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Simmer the soy sauce, mirin, and sugar for exactly one minute to cook off the raw alcohol.**  
Add the water, kombu, and bonito flakes. Let it come back to a bare simmer, then immediately turn off the heat and drop in the dried shiitake mushroom to steep for ten minutes as the liquid cools.
- 2. Strain the liquid through a fine-mesh sieve into a jar, discarding the solids, and chill it rapidly.**  
This concentrated, umami-heavy broth is your dipping sauce (tsuyu). Pop the jar in the fridge or freezer to chill it down quickly. It can be made up to a week in advance.

- 1. Fill a large mixing bowl with cold water and two massive handfuls of ice before you boil the noodles.**

Have a colander ready in the sink. Cooking soba is fast, and the thermal shock must happen immediately. You need to be ready.

- 2. Drop the soba into two or three quarts of vigorously boiling, unsalted water and cook according to package directions.**

Prod them gently with chopsticks just once or twice so they don't stick together, but do not over-stir, or they will break. If the water threatens to boil over, do not add cold water—just slightly lower the heat to maintain a rolling simmer.

- 3. Scoop out one cup of the hot cooking water to save, then dump the noodles into a colander and vigorously scrub them under cold running tap water.**

The reserved hot water is your sobayu. When washing the noodles, use your hands to aggressively rub them together. This friction scrubs off the viscous layer of surface starch that causes them to become gummy.

- 4. Plunge the washed noodles directly into your prepared ice water bath and swirl them for thirty seconds.**

Keep swirling until they are ice cold and tight, then drain thoroughly, shaking off as much excess water as possible. This extreme thermal contraction is entirely responsible for generating the prized firm chew.

- 5. Divide the chilled noodles onto plates, top generously with shredded nori, and serve alongside the dipping sauce and aromatics.**

Mix a little wasabi and scallion into your dipping cup. Dip just the bottom half of a mouthful of noodles into the sauce and slurp loudly. When you finish the noodles, pour the hot, starchy sobayu into your remaining dipping sauce and drink it like a comforting soup.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Don't feel guilty about taking a shortcut on a busy weeknight.**

First-generation households frequently use high-quality bottled Mentsuyu diluted with cold water. To avoid a mass-produced flavor profile, simply steep a fresh piece of kombu or a pinch of katsuobushi in the diluted base in the fridge for twenty minutes to restore the volatile aromatics.



# Leftover Shiozake Tanindon

鮭の卵とじ丼

*sake no tamagotoji don*

In Japanese kitchens, *mottainai* isn't some trendy sustainability buzzword—it's the operating system. When you inevitably grill too much heavily salted, perfectly charred shiozake for breakfast, grandmotherly logic dictates it becomes an accidental weeknight masterpiece. By flaking that deeply savory leftover salmon, simmering it in a sweet broth with onions to temper the salt, and binding it all under a silken, soft-scrambled blanket of egg, you get an unapologetically beautiful bowl of comfort. It transforms cold leftovers into something you'd happily eat every single day.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 cup</b>	Japanese short-grain rice <i>cooked and kept hot</i>	<b>1/3 cup</b>	water
<b>1 cup</b>	leftover cooked salted salmon <i>skin and pin bones meticulously removed, flaked</i>	<b>3 tbsp</b>	dry sherry
<b>1/2 med</b>	yellow onion <i>thinly sliced</i>	<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	mirin
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	fresh ginger <i>peeled and julienned into hair-thin matchsticks</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	soy sauce
<b>3 large</b>	eggs <i>lightly beaten, leaving distinct streaks of white and yolk</i>	<b>2 tsp</b>	granulated sugar
		<b>2 med</b>	scallion greens <i>thinly sliced</i>
		<b>1 pinch</b>	kizami nori
		<b>1 pinch</b>	shichimi togarashi

## PREPARATION

- **Cure your own salmon if starting from scratch.**

If you want to make this but don't have leftover shiozake, rub a fresh salmon fillet with salt (about 2% of its weight), let it sit in the fridge for 30 minutes to overnight, then broil until the skin crisps up before flaking.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whisk together the simmering liquid.**

In a small bowl, combine the water, dry sherry, mirin, soy sauce, and sugar, stirring until the sugar dissolves.

- 2. Simmer the onions and ginger in the broth.**

Pour the broth mixture into a small, 8 to 10-inch skillet, add the sliced onions and julienned ginger, and bring to a gentle simmer over medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes until softened.

- 3. Revive the leftover salmon.**

Gently scatter the flaked salmon into the simmering broth to warm through and absorb the savory liquids for about 60 seconds.

**1. Pour exactly half the egg over the mixture in a figure-eight motion.**

With the broth at a steady simmer, slowly pour half the lightly beaten eggs evenly into the skillet, doing absolutely nothing to stir it while it sets for 30 to 45 seconds.

**2. Add the remaining egg to achieve hanjuku perfection.**

Pour the rest of the egg over the top to fill any bare spots, immediately cover with a tight-fitting lid, and turn the heat off completely.

**3. Let the residual heat steam the egg.**

Leave the skillet undisturbed on the warm burner for 60 to 90 seconds to create a glossy, incredibly tender, soft-set texture.

**4. Slide the omelet over rice and serve.**

Uncover the skillet, loosen the edges with a spatula, and carefully slide half of the salmon and egg mixture directly over hot rice, garnishing with scallions, nori, and a dusting of shichimi togarashi.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

● **The secret is entirely in the staging.**

Pouring the egg in two distinct stages is what gives you that textbook silken, runny texture instead of a rubbery scramble.

● **Canned salmon is an acceptable weeknight substitute.**

If you don't have leftovers, use high-quality canned wild Alaskan sockeye salmon. Drain it exceptionally well and pick out any bones—the soy, sherry, and ginger will elevate it completely.



# Home-Style Gyudon

牛丼

*gyūdon*

Before it was commercialized into neon-lit fast food, gyudon was the ultimate Japanese comfort food—a fragrant, bubbling pot of beef and onions sweetening the air of the family kitchen. In the real world, a Japanese grandmother wouldn’t dream of using apple juice or synthesized bouillon to doctor her broth. She relies on the profound, elemental magic of soy sauce, sake, mirin, and sugar. This recipe strips away the commercial artifice. By employing a traditional “meat-over-onions” simmering technique and ingredients easily scored at any American supermarket, it delivers a deeply savory, soul-warming bowl that tastes exactly like home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	thinly sliced beef	<b>3 tbsp</b>	white or light brown sugar
<b>1 large</b>	yellow or white onion <i>peeled and halved</i>	<b>4 cup</b>	cooked short-grain Japanese white rice
<b>1 inch</b>	fresh ginger <i>peeled and finely julienned</i>	<b>4 large</b>	eggs <i>poached or soft-boiled</i>
<b>1 cup</b>	water or dashi	<b>1/4 cup</b>	beni-shoga
<b>1/2 cup</b>	soy sauce	<b>2 med</b>	scallions <i>thinly sliced on the bias</i>
<b>1/3 cup</b>	dry sake	<b>1 tsp</b>	shichimi togarashi
<b>1/3 cup</b>	mirin		

## PREPARATION

- **Cut the onion for dual textures.**

Slice one half of the onion very thinly (about 1/8 inch) so it dissolves and sweetens the broth naturally. Slice the other half into thicker 1/2-inch wedges to retain a pleasant structural bite.

- **Source or slice the beef paper-thin.**

If using a whole ribeye or chuck instead of pre-shaved meat, freeze it for 45 minutes until firm, then slice it paper-thin against the grain. Frozen shaved steak meant for Philly cheesesteaks is also a perfect, accessible weeknight substitute.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the broth off the heat.**

In a medium, shallow pot or deep skillet, combine the water (or dashi), soy sauce, sake, mirin, sugar, and julienned ginger, stirring gently to help the sugar dissolve before touching the stove.

- 2. Simmer the onions until translucent.**

Place the pot over medium heat and add all the sliced onions. Bring the liquid to a gentle simmer and let them cook for 3 to 4 minutes until they begin to soften.

**1. Drape the beef over the onions.**

Once the onions have softened, lower the heat slightly. Gently lay the thinly sliced beef over the bed of onions in an even layer. Do not stir vigorously; letting the meat steam-simmer on top prevents the proteins from seizing and keeps the beef meltingly tender.

**2. Skim the scum and simmer patiently.**

Gently skim away any grey foam that rises to the surface. Once the beef loses its raw red color, lower the heat to medium-low, cover with a lid slightly ajar, and simmer gently for 15 to 20 minutes until the liquid reduces by a third.

**3. Serve over hot rice.**

Fill deep bowls with hot steamed rice. Use tongs to mound the beef and onions over the rice, then ladle a generous spoonful of the deeply flavored broth over the top.

**4. Garnish and break the yolk.**

Top each bowl with a soft poached egg, a bright pinch of beni-shoga, a scattering of scallions, and a dusting of shichimi togarashi. Break the yolk and let it coat the beef before taking your first bite.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Do not rush the boil.**

American stoves run hot, and the instinct is to boil the meat quickly to get dinner on the table. The magic of Japanese simmering lies in a gentle, low-heat reduction to keep the meat tender.

● **Use the right rice.**

If short-grain Japanese rice is unavailable, medium-grain Calrose is an excellent alternative. Avoid long-grain or Jasmine, which lack the necessary sticky starch to bind with the rich, savory broth.



# Mentaiko or Tarako Pasta

明太子パスタ

*mentaiko pasuta*

If you grew up in a Japanese-American house, this was the ultimate weeknight comfort food. Invented in a tiny Shibuya joint in the 1960s as a cheap substitute for caviar, real wafu pasta doesn't rely on the heavy cream and mayonnaise you find in modern internet recipes. It hinges on one beautifully simple trick: kombu-cha, a kelp tea powder that delivers a profound umami punch without drowning the delicate fish roe. The cardinal rule here is to never let the roe touch a hot pan. The heat will denature the eggs and turn them into a grainy ruin. Everything comes together in a single mixing bowl using just the residual heat of the freshly boiled noodles.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>7 oz</b>	dried spaghetti	<b>1 tsp</b>	soy sauce
<b>3 med</b>	Tarako or Karashi Mentaiko sacs <i>removed from membrane</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	fresh lemon juice
<b>2 tbsp</b>	unsalted butter <i>softened to room temp</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	nori <i>shredded</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	Kombu-cha	<b>5 med</b>	shiso leaves <i>thinly sliced</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Score the roe sacs lengthwise and gently scrape the tiny eggs out using the dull back of a knife.**

Discard the outer membranes. You want just the raw, delicate eggs.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Combine the scraped roe, softened butter, kelp powder, soy sauce, and lemon juice in a large, heat-proof serving bowl.**  
Mash everything into a rough paste with a fork. Keep this bowl away from the stove—heat is the absolute enemy of the raw roe.
- 2. Boil the spaghetti in a large pot of lightly salted water until just past al dente.**  
Because the fish roe is intensely salty on its own, use far less salt in the water than you would for a standard Italian pasta.
- 3. Scoop out two tablespoons of the starchy pasta boiling water and add it to the roe paste.**
- 4. Drain the noodles and immediately transfer them, piping hot, into the mixing bowl.**  
Toss vigorously. The residual heat will melt the butter and warm the roe without cooking it, while the starch emulsifies the fat into a luxurious, glossy sauce.

- 1. Divide into individual bowls, garnish generously with shredded nori and shiso, and serve instantly.**

This is a dish that waits for no one.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **If you can't find Kombu-cha, substitute with a half-teaspoon of Hondashi or a pinch of MSG.**

It won't have the exact depth of the kelp powder, but it provides the essential umami backbone.

- **Mentaiko and Tarako are usually sold frozen in multi-packs and thaw quickly.**

Snap off only what you need and let it thaw in the fridge, or seal it in a bag under cold running water for ten minutes.



# Obaachan's Wisdom: Healing & Zero Waste

*Comforting sick-day foods, hearty winter warmers, and the traditional zero-waste philosophy of mottainai.*

There is no waste in a Japanese grandmother's kitchen. None. Long before chefs started bragging about root-to-stem menus, there was *mottainai*—the quiet, unpretentious mandate to respect every scrap of the harvest. It wasn't a trend. It was survival, thrift, and a bone-deep understanding that tossing good food is an insult to the ingredient itself. You take the wilted greens and pickle them. You boil the peels into a broth that tastes like pure comfort.

This is the food that puts you back together when you're broken. The absolute antithesis of restaurant cooking. A pot of softly bubbling *okayu* or a fat-slicked bowl of *tonjiru* fortified with heavy root vegetables doesn't care about plating. It

cares about keeping you alive, warm, and tethered to the generations of Japanese Americans who made profound magic out of exactly what they had.





# Umeboshi to Tamago no Okayu

梅干しと卵のお粥

*umeboshi to tamago no okayu*

When the winter winds howl or you're feeling beaten down by the world, this is the bowl Japanese grandmothers prescribe. Okayu is the ultimate comfort food—a minimalist, deeply soothing rice porridge born of pure zero-waste pragmatism. By using cold, leftover short-grain rice, this life-saving staple comes together in twelve minutes flat. The magic lies entirely in the synergy: a profoundly restorative starchy base, the medicinal tang of pickled plum, and tender ribbons of egg cooked flawlessly by the residual heat of the pot. No fussy techniques, just centuries of intuitive culinary wisdom in a single bowl.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3/4 cup</b>	cooked Japanese short-grain white rice <i>cold and leftover, unwashed</i>	<b>1 large</b>	egg <i>lightly beaten</i>
<b>1 1/4 cup</b>	water	<b>1 med</b>	umeboshi
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1 tbsp</b>	scallions <i>thinly sliced, green parts only</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	hondashi powder	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	toasted sesame seeds
		<b>1 tbsp</b>	shredded nori

## PREPARATION

- **Ensure your leftover rice is properly cooled.**  
Cold, day-old rice breaks apart better in the water without immediately dissolving into mush.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Combine the rice, water, salt, and hondashi in a heavy-bottomed pot.**  
Use a wooden spoon to gently break up any large clumps of the cold rice, taking care not to mash the grains.
- 2. Bring the mixture to a gentle boil over medium-high heat, then immediately reduce to low.**  
Simmer uncovered for 8 to 12 minutes until the rice expands into a soft, thick soup. Stir only once or twice; over-stirring releases excessive starch and turns the porridge into a gummy paste.
- 3. Slowly drizzle the beaten egg in a spiral motion over the surface of the gently bubbling porridge.**  
Do not stir immediately. Let the egg sit completely untouched for 5 to 10 seconds so the proteins begin to set.

1. **Gently fold the rice from the bottom of the pot over the top of the egg just once, then turn off the heat.**

Cover the pot with a tight-fitting lid and let it sit for 1 to 2 minutes. The trapped residual heat will gently steam the egg into soft, fluffy ribbons without clouding your porridge.

2. **Transfer the hot porridge to a deep bowl and nestle the umeboshi directly in the center.**

Scatter the scallions, sesame seeds, and nori over the top, and serve immediately, breaking off tiny bits of the sour plum to eat with each spoonful.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Unwashed short-grain rice is strictly non-negotiable.**

You must use authentic Japanese short-grain rice to achieve the essential sticky, cohesive texture. Do not rinse the leftover rice before adding it to the pot, as the retained starch is what gives the porridge its velvety, restorative quality.

- **The dashi is a modern weeknight hack.**

Traditional healing porridge relies purely on water, but a pinch of instant hondashi powder provides a profound, restaurant-quality umami depth that turns this from a sick-bed remedy into a highly satisfying dinner.



# Obaachan's Kake Udon

かけうどん

*kake udon*

Kake udon is the chicken noodle soup of Japan, the ultimate restorative bowl passed down from an Obaachan's kitchen when you were tired, cold, or coming down with something. The Kansai-style broth is pale gold and profoundly savory—a masterclass in restraint that relies on a non-negotiable golden ratio of dashi, light soy, and mirin. And because a Japanese grandmother wastes nothing, the spent kelp and bonito used to brew that dashi are given a second life. They are simmered down into a sweet, sticky relish called tsukudani, turning a fast, healing bowl of weeknight noodles into a profound lesson in respecting the ingredient.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 cup</b>	awase dashi <i>homemade or prepared from premium dashi packets</i>	<b>1 oz</b>	kamaboko <i>cut into 4 thin slices</i>
<b>3 tbsp</b>	usukuchi shoyu	<b>2 tbsp</b>	tenkasu
<b>4 tbsp</b>	hon-mirin <i>divided use</i>	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	shichimi togarashi
<b>4 tsp</b>	sake <i>divided use</i>	<b>1 med</b>	spent kombu <i>piece, reserved from making homemade dashi, chopped into thin matchsticks</i>
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1/2 cup</b>	spent katsuobushi <i>reserved from making homemade dashi, roughly chopped</i>
<b>2 large</b>	frozen sanuki udon blocks <i>kept frozen; do not thaw</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	koikuchi soy sauce
<b>2 med</b>	scallions <i>sliced paper-thin</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	sugar
		<b>1 tsp</b>	toasted white sesame seeds

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare the dashi.**

If making homemade awase dashi from scratch, reserve the wet, spent kombu and katsuobushi after straining so you can make the zero-waste tsukudani relish.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the golden broth.**

In a medium pot, combine the dashi, usukuchi shoyu, three tablespoons of the hon-mirin, and one teaspoon of the sake over medium heat. Let it bubble gently for one to two minutes—a crucial step to burn off the harsh alcohol and leave behind only the deep, rounded sweetness. Taste, adjust with salt if necessary, and drop the heat to keep it steaming hot.

**1. Cook the noodles from frozen.**

Bring a large, separate pot of water to a rolling boil and drop the frozen udon blocks straight in. Do not force them apart with chopsticks or they will break; just let the boiling water naturally loosen them for about a minute until they achieve that perfect, bouncy chew.

**2. Rinse away the surface starch.**

Drain the noodles into a colander and briefly rinse them under hot running water. It is an old-school trick to wash away the gelatinized starch on the exterior, ensuring your delicate golden broth stays crystal clear in the bowl.

**3. Assemble the bowls.**

Divide the hot, rinsed noodles between two deep bowls and ladle that steaming, fragrant broth right over the top. Garnish with the sliced kamaboko, scallions, and a handful of crunchy tenkasu, and serve immediately with a dash of shichimi togarashi.

**4. Transform the dashi leftovers into tsukudani.**

Place the chopped, wet kombu and katsuobushi into a small saucepan with the koikuchi soy sauce, the remaining tablespoon of hon-mirin, the remaining tablespoon of sake, and the sugar. Simmer over medium-low heat, stirring frequently, until the liquid evaporates and the mixture turns into a sticky, caramelized glaze, then fold in the sesame seeds to serve over plain white rice.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The Weeknight Dashi Shortcut.**

If you don't have time to make scratch dashi, drop two premium dashi packets into three cups of water, simmer for five minutes, remove the packets, and proceed with the soy sauce and mirin. In a pinch, one and a half teaspoons of granulated hondashi dissolved in hot water will do the trick.



# Gudakusan Tonjiru

具だくさん豚汁

*gu-da-ku-san ton-ji-ru*

Forget the delicate, ethereal broth served in tiny lacquered bowls before your sushi. This is a working-class, refrigerator-clearing powerhouse of a stew. Grandmothers have been using this rich, pork-fat-laced soup to warm bones and stretch leftovers since the Meiji era. The secret to making it taste exactly like the homeland isn't in hunting down impossibly rare mountain tubers; it's in the pragmatic technique. By frying the root vegetables in rendered pork fat first, and splitting the miso addition to preserve its fermented soul, you get a deeply restorative bowl that effortlessly bridges the gap between authentic heritage and a busy American weeknight.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1/2 lb</b>	pork belly or pork shoulder <i>thinly sliced into paper-thin coins</i>	<b>1/2 large</b>	leek <i>white and light green parts only, sliced diagonally</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	toasted sesame oil	<b>5 cup</b>	dashi stock
<b>1/2 med</b>	daikon radish <i>peeled and cut into 1/4-inch quarter-rounds</i>	<b>5 tbsp</b>	awase miso <i>divided</i>
<b>1 large</b>	carrot <i>peeled and cut into half-rounds</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	soy sauce
<b>1 med</b>	Yukon Gold potato <i>peeled and cut into bite-sized chunks</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	mirin
<b>1/2 med</b>	burdock root <i>peeled, shaved like a pencil, soaked in water for 10 minutes, and drained</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	fresh ginger <i>grated</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Freeze your pork belly for effortless, paper-thin slicing.**

If you cannot find pre-sliced hot pot pork belly, freeze a fatty block of pork for 20 minutes to firm it up, making it simple to slice into thin coins with a standard chef's knife.

- **Lean on high-quality instant dashi.**

Making scratch dashi from kombu and katsuobushi is wonderful, but relying on good dashi packets or instant powder ensures this deeply nourishing meal actually makes it to the table on a Tuesday night.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sear the pork in toasted sesame oil until the fat renders.**

Place a heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat, add the oil, and cook the pork for 2 to 3 minutes until it loses its pink color. This crucial step kicks off the savory foundation of the stew.

**1. Stir-fry the root vegetables in the rendered pork fat.**

Toss the daikon, carrot, potato, and burdock root into the pot, cooking for 3 to 4 minutes until their edges soften and they absorb the savory oils, preventing them from turning to mush later.

**2. Pour in the dashi and meticulously skim away any rising scum.**

Bring the stock to a gentle boil over medium-high heat, carefully spooning off the coagulated foam that floats to the surface for the first few minutes to ensure a clean, refined broth.

**3. Dissolve a small portion of the miso into the simmering broth.**

Turn the heat down to a low simmer, dissolve 1 tablespoon of miso into the liquid, cover, and let it go for 15 minutes to force that deep umami straight into the core of the thick root vegetables.

**4. Add the aromatics and kill the heat entirely.**

Stir in the sliced leeks, soy sauce, mirin, and grated ginger, let it cook for exactly one minute, then turn off the stove.

**5. Swirl in the remaining miso off the heat to preserve its fragile aroma.**

Use a ladle and chopsticks to gently dissolve the remaining 4 tablespoons of miso into the hot liquid, ensuring its fermented funk isn't destroyed by boiling, before ladling the rich stew into large bowls.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

● **Embrace the zero-waste philosophy of the dish.**

Tonjiru is a working template for whatever needs using up in the crisper drawer; toss in wilting cabbage, extra mushrooms, or stray greens without fear of ruining its authenticity.

● **Don't stress over obscure Japanese tubers.**

If you cannot find traditional satoimo (taro) or burdock root at your local Asian market, Yukon Gold potatoes and sliced fresh shiitake mushrooms are highly authentic, widely used regional substitutes.



# Yamanashi-Style Kabocha no Hoto

かぼちゃのほうとう

*kabocha no hōtō*

While the rest of Japan centers its plate on polished rice, the harsh, mountainous Yamanashi prefecture relied on wheat. The result is hoto: a deeply rustic, soul-warming noodle stew that feels like a hug from a Japanese grandmother. Unlike udon, these noodles are made without salt and dropped entirely raw into the bubbling pot. The untamed flour from the noodles and the sweet, melting edges of the kabocha squash work together to create a thick, glossy, miso-rich gravy that coats your ribs and chases away the deepest chill. It's practical, imperfect, and incredibly forgiving.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 1/2 cup</b>	all-purpose flour <i>plus extra for dusting</i>	<b>1 med</b>	carrot <i>peeled and cut into 1/4-inch half-moons</i>
<b>135 ml</b>	warm water	<b>2 cup</b>	napa cabbage <i>chopped into 1-inch squares</i>
<b>6 cup</b>	dashi <i>brewed from high-quality packets or granules</i>	<b>3.5 oz</b>	shiitake mushrooms <i>stems removed and sliced</i>
<b>1/2 lb</b>	thinly sliced pork belly <i>cut into 2-inch pieces</i>	<b>1 med</b>	abura-age <i>blanched in hot water to remove excess oil, then sliced thinly</i>
<b>3/4 lb</b>	kabocha squash <i>seeds removed, unpeeled, cut into 1.5-inch rustic chunks</i>	<b>1 med</b>	long green onion <i>sliced diagonally</i>
<b>1 small</b>	daikon radish <i>peeled and quartered into 1/4-inch slices</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	miso paste <i>a 1:1 blend of red (aka) and white (shiro) miso</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Microwave the whole kabocha squash before chopping.**

Microwaving the entire piece for about 3 minutes softens the notoriously dense flesh just enough to save your knife blade and your wrists when cutting.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Mix the flour and warm water in a bowl until it forms a shaggy dough, kneading briefly just to bring it together.**

Because hoto dough has absolutely no salt, it requires zero resting time for gluten development. Knead for just 2 to 3 minutes until cohesive, then cover with a damp towel.

- 2. Bring the dashi to a boil in a heavy Dutch oven, drop in the kabocha, daikon, and carrots, and simmer for 10 minutes.**

Leaving the tough green skin on the kabocha is crucial; it holds the chunks together while the sweet orange flesh dissolves into the broth.

- 1. Roll the dough out on a heavily floured surface to an 1/8-inch thickness, fold into thirds, and slice into 1/2-inch wide ribbons.**

Toss the cut noodles generously in flour and don't shake off the excess. This raw surface starch is exactly what thickens the stew.

- 2. Add the pork belly, cabbage, mushrooms, and abura-age to the tender roots, skimming off any foam that rises.**

- 3. Dissolve exactly half of the miso paste into the bubbling broth, then drop in the raw, flour-dusted noodles.**

Boiling miso usually kills its aroma, but doing it here allows the raw noodles to absorb the savory flavor from the inside out. Simmer uncovered for 6 to 8 minutes, separating them gently with chopsticks, as the broth transforms into a thick gravy.

- 4. Turn off the heat, stir in the remaining miso and sliced green onions, and let rest covered for a few minutes.**

Adding the rest of the miso off the heat preserves its fresh, probiotic punch. Ladle into wide bowls, making sure everyone gets a melting chunk of kabocha.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Hoto-meshi is the ultimate zero-waste breakfast.**

If you have leftovers, do not throw them away. The stew will solidify in the fridge overnight. The next morning, ladle the cold, thick pudding directly over piping hot white rice. It is often the best part of the meal.

- **Fresh noodles work in a pinch, but skip the frozen udon.**

If you are too exhausted to knead the 10-minute dough, you can substitute a pound of raw, fresh wide udon or fettuccine. Avoid frozen udon; it is pre-boiled, meaning the surface starches are set and won't thicken the broth properly.



# Dashi-Gara Tsukudani

だしから 佃煮

*dashi-gara tsukudani*

In a traditional Japanese home, nothing of value goes in the trash. When a grandmother makes dashi, she carefully squeezes the spent kelp and bonito flakes dry, tossing them into a freezer bag until she has enough to work a little weeknight magic. Simmered down in a dark, glossy syrup of soy, sake, and mirin, these exhausted scraps are resurrected into tsukudani—an intensely savory, sticky, sweet condiment that turns a plain bowl of steamed rice into an absolute feast. The real secret here is a splash of rice vinegar; it breaks down the tough kelp into melt-in-your-mouth perfection without leaving a single trace of sourness behind.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 cup</b>	leftover kombu and bonito flakes <i>thawed and squeezed of excess water</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	sake
<b>1/2 cup</b>	water	<b>2 tbsp</b>	mirin
<b>1 tbsp</b>	rice vinegar	<b>1 tbsp</b>	sugar
<b>2 1/2 tbsp</b>	Japanese soy sauce	<b>1 tbsp</b>	white sesame seeds <i>toasted</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Save your scraps.**

A single batch of dashi rarely yields enough scraps for a proper braise. Always squeeze the excess moisture from your leftover kombu and bonito, storing them in a dedicated ziplock bag in the freezer until you have about a packed cup.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Slice the kombu into thin, matchstick-sized strips and roughly chop the bonito flakes.**

If the kombu feels slimy, that is exactly what you want—it means a luxurious, gelatinous mouthfeel is on the way.

- 2. Combine the sliced kombu, water, and rice vinegar in a small saucepan and bring to a gentle boil.**

Cover the pot, reduce the heat to low, and simmer for 15 to 20 minutes until tender. Do not skip the vinegar; it is the chemical key to breaking down the kelp's tough fibers so they melt on the tongue.

- 3. Stir in the chopped bonito flakes, soy sauce, sake, mirin, and sugar once the kombu is tender and the liquid has reduced by half.**

Leave the pot uncovered and increase the heat slightly to medium-low.

1. **Simmer the mixture uncovered until the liquid has almost entirely evaporated and the ingredients are coated in a dark, sticky sheen.**

This will take 10 to 15 minutes. Stir frequently during the final few minutes to ensure the caramelizing sugars do not burn on the bottom of the pan.

2. **Remove the pan from the heat and fold in the toasted sesame seeds.**

Transfer the tsukudani to a glass container to cool completely, where it will naturally thicken and deepen in flavor.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **The shelf life is exceptional.**

Because it relies on the osmotic preservation of salt and sugar, tsukudani will easily keep for up to two weeks when stored in a sterilized glass container in the refrigerator.

- **Do not eat this by the bowlful.**

This is a potent condiment. Place a small pinch atop steaming white rice, tuck it into the center of an onigiri, or serve alongside a simple breakfast of grilled fish and miso soup.

- **Upgrade with dried mushrooms.**

Add two or three rehydrated, thinly sliced dried shiitake mushrooms along with the soy sauce for an unparalleled explosion of savory depth, utilizing a splash of the mushroom soaking liquid in place of plain water.



# Zosui

卵雑炊

*ta-ma-go zoh-soo-ee*

When the Ohio winters grow bitter, or the sniffles set in, Obaachan doesn't make chicken noodle soup—she makes zosui. Born from the unforgiving necessity to waste absolutely nothing, this restorative rice soup transforms yesterday's cold, hard grains and leftover dashi into a masterpiece of domestic comfort. There are no Hollywood embellishments here, just the profound umami of good broth, the delicate suspension of a softly cooked egg, and the singular, non-negotiable grandmotherly secret of rinsing the cooked rice first so the soup remains crystal clear.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 cup</b>	dashi <i>prepared from instant granules or a premium packet</i>	<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	cooked Japanese short-grain rice <i>chilled from the day before</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	soy sauce <i>preferably usukuchi or light soy sauce</i>	<b>2 large</b>	eggs <i>lightly beaten</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	sake	<b>2 med</b>	scallions <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	kosher salt		

## PREPARATION

- **Use yesterday's rice.**

Leftover, fully chilled rice is essential because its lowered moisture content and hardened texture allow it to absorb the hot dashi without immediately turning to paste.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Wash the cooked rice under cold running water.**

Place the leftover rice in a fine-mesh strainer and rinse it for 15 to 20 seconds, using your fingers to gently break up clumps until the water runs clear. This washes away the sticky exterior starch and ensures the broth remains light and fluid.

- 2. Bring the seasoned dashi to a boil.**

In a medium saucepan or traditional donabe pot, combine the dashi, soy sauce, sake, and kosher salt. Place over medium-high heat until it reaches a gentle boil.

- 3. Simmer the washed rice briefly.**

Lower the heat to medium-low, add the drained rice to the pot, and stir gently just once or twice. Let it simmer for 2 to 3 minutes until heated through, taking care not to over-stir so the grains remain intact.

**1. Swirl in the beaten eggs and let them set untouched.**

Ensure the soup is at a very gentle simmer, then slowly pour the beaten eggs over the surface in a thin, circular stream. Stop and wait 15 to 30 seconds before touching it, allowing the proteins to set into elegant, fluffy ribbons.

**2. Trap the steam to finish cooking.**

Turn off the heat, give the soup one gentle fold to integrate the egg, and cover the pot with a lid for 1 minute before ladling into bowls and garnishing generously with scallions.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The dashi reality check.**

While soaking kombu and shaving dried bonito is a beautiful ritual, modern Japanese families routinely use instant dashi granules or premium tea-bag style dashi packets for weeknight zosui without sacrificing authentic flavor.

● **Respect the rice.**

Do not substitute jasmine, basmati, or standard American long-grain white rice. They lack the necessary structural integrity and will disintegrate into mush when boiled.



# Weekend Teppan & Hot Pots

*Interactive, communal dining meant for weekend family gatherings.*

The portable butane burner is the beating heart of the Japanese American weekend. Dragged out of the hall closet and plunked dead center on the dining table, it turns the dining room into the kitchen. This is communal eating at its most elemental—you aren't just feeding people, you're handing them the tools to feed themselves.

It's the beautiful, controlled chaos of building a temaki cone from whatever scraps of fish and pickles you can snatch first. It's the heavy sizzle of okonomiyaki—an unapologetic, clean-out-the-fridge pancake—and the slow, sweet simmer of a winter sukiyaki pot. There is no plating here. No ceremony. Just a table full of people, pouring drinks and reaching across one another in the steam.





# Temaki Zushi

手巻き寿司

*te-ma-ki zu-shi*

Forget the ancient ceremonial pretense. The modern Japanese hand-roll party is the glorious product of a brilliant 1980s marketing campaign that figured out how to bring the secret stash of sushi chefs to the family dining table. It is unfussy, deeply communal, and hinges entirely on one thing: getting the rice right. You don't need years of apprenticeship to make this. You just need a bottle of vinegar, a wooden paddle, and whatever beautiful, chaotic spread of fish, sweet omelet, and mayo-drenched canned tuna your family actually wants to eat.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 cup</b>	short-grain Japanese rice <i>washed gently until water runs clear and drained in a colander for 30 minutes</i>	<b>1/2 lb</b>	sashimi-grade tuna block <i>sliced into long 1/2-inch thick strips</i>
<b>2 3/4 cup</b>	water	<b>1/2 lb</b>	sashimi-grade salmon block <i>sliced into long 1/2-inch thick strips</i>
<b>1 small</b>	dried kombu <i>wiped gently with a damp cloth</i>	<b>1 med</b>	Japanese cucumber <i>seeds scooped out, cut into long matchsticks</i>
<b>4 tbsp</b>	Japanese rice vinegar	<b>10 large</b>	shiso leaves
<b>2 tbsp</b>	white sugar	<b>5 oz</b>	canned tuna in water <i>drained entirely</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	fine sea salt	<b>2 tbsp</b>	Kewpie mayonnaise
<b>10 large</b>	roasted yakinori seaweed sheets <i>cut exactly in half crosswise into rectangles</i>	<b>8 small</b>	imitation crab sticks

## PREPARATION

- **Nail the moisture content.**

Sushi rice requires slightly less water than standard white rice because you will be adding liquid vinegar to it later. Draining the washed rice for a full 30 minutes before cooking ensures the grains remain firm and distinct.

- **Organize your fillings.**

Temaki is a visual feast. Prep all your fish, vegetables, and cooked items before the rice finishes cooking so you can serve the rice while it is still slightly warm and at its textural peak.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Cook the rice.**

Place the drained rice, water, and kombu in a rice cooker. Cook on the sushi rice setting, or the standard white rice setting if that is unavailable.

**1. Brew the golden ratio.**

While the rice cooks, gently heat the rice vinegar, sugar, and salt in a small saucepan just until the solids dissolve. Take care never to let it boil, as the delicate acidity will evaporate. Let it cool completely.

**2. Transfer the rice.**

Discard the kombu and immediately transfer the piping hot rice to a wide, flat dish like a glass baking dish or a traditional wooden hangiri. Pour the cooled vinegar mixture evenly over the top.

**3. Mix by cutting.**

Hold a rice paddle vertically and slice through the rice in a sharp cutting motion to mix, gently folding the rice from the bottom up while fanning it constantly to cool. Never mash or stir in circles, or you will release the starches and end up with unappetizing wallpaper paste.

**4. Set the table.**

Mix the drained canned tuna with the Kewpie mayonnaise in a small bowl. Arrange all the raw fish, vegetables, crab sticks, and the tuna-mayo mixture beautifully on a large communal platter.

**5. Roll and eat.**

Place the stack of halved nori and the wide bowl of glossy rice in the center of the table. Let everyone build their own cones, eating them immediately before the seaweed loses its crisp crackle.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The Golden Ratio.**

The secret to authentic sushi rice is a strict 4:2:1 volume ratio of rice vinegar, sugar, and salt. It perfectly balances acidity, sweetness, and salinity without overpowering the delicate raw fish.

- **The Golden Rule of Filling.**

Do not overfill your hand rolls. A tablespoon or two of rice spread thinly on the left third of the nori, topped with just one strip of fish, a cucumber stick, and a single shiso leaf is perfection.

- **Keep it crisp.**

Nori absorbs moisture from the air and rice almost instantly. If your nori has gone slightly soft in the pantry, pass it quickly over a dry, hot skillet or open gas flame for two seconds right before serving.



# Kansai-Style Okonomiyaki

関西風お好み焼き

*kansai-fu okonomiyaki*

Kansai-style okonomiyaki was born out of necessity—a brilliant, pragmatic feat of post-war home economics that evolved into Japan’s ultimate soul food. This isn’t some dense Western pancake; it is a highly hydrated, cabbage-packed vegetable fritter bound by a fragile, umami-rich matrix of dashi and mountain yam. While a dedicated griddle in the center of the weekend dining table is the nostalgic ideal, the real beauty here is its weeknight utility. You can mix the batter and chop the cabbage days in advance, turning a Tuesday night in an American suburb into a masterclass in texture and deeply comforting, unpretentious flavor.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3/4 cup</b>	all-purpose flour	<b>1 tbsp</b>	beni-shoga <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	cold dashi <i>made by dissolving 1/2 tsp instant Hondashi in cold water</i>	<b>2 med</b>	scallions <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	nagaimo <i>peeled and grated</i>	<b>6 med</b>	pork belly <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>2 tbsp</b>	okonomiyaki sauce
<b>300 g</b>	green cabbage <i>tough core removed, roughly chopped into 1/2-inch squares</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	Japanese mayonnaise
<b>2 large</b>	eggs	<b>1 tsp</b>	aonori
<b>2 tbsp</b>	tenkasu	<b>2 tbsp</b>	katsuobushi

## PREPARATION

- **Chop the cabbage into rough half-inch squares.**

Do not shred the cabbage like coleslaw, as it will become stringy; this specific rough mince is the secret to a pancake that holds together but maintains a hearty crunch.

- **Whisk together the flour, cold dashi, grated nagaimo, and salt in a medium bowl until just smooth.**

This batter base can be made up to two days ahead and kept in the fridge until you are ready to cook.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Gently fold half the cabbage, one egg, half the tenkasu, half the beni-shoga, half the scallions, and half the liquid batter together in a small bowl.**

Always mix one pancake at a time using a bottom-to-top folding motion, and stop as soon as the cabbage is coated and the egg is slightly streaky—overmixing develops gluten and makes the pancake tough.

- 1. Pour the mixed batter onto a medium-high cast-iron skillet or a 400°F electric griddle lightly coated in neutral oil.**  
Use the side of your spoon to gently shape it into a 6-inch circle about 3/4-inch thick, poking the top lightly to create air vents, and cook undisturbed for 3 minutes.
- 2. Lay three slices of pork belly across the top of the pancake, then use two spatulas to confidently flip it over.**
- 3. Immediately cover the pan with a lid, lower the heat slightly, and steam-cook for 4 to 5 minutes.**  
The trapped steam gently cooks the dense cabbage core while the rendering pork fat fries the bottom.
- 4. Remove the lid, flip the pancake one last time so the pork is facing up, and cook uncovered for 2 to 3 more minutes.**  
Do not press down on the pancake with your spatula; pressing squeezes out the air pockets and completely ruins the fluffy texture.
- 5. Slide the pancake onto a plate and garnish generously.**  
Brush with okonomiyaki sauce, drizzle with Japanese mayonnaise in a zig-zag pattern, sprinkle with aonori, and top with katsuobushi to serve immediately while the flakes are still dancing.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Substitute nagaimo with mayonnaise and baking powder if you can't find it.**  
If fresh mountain yam is unavailable at your local Asian market, mix 1 tablespoon of Japanese mayonnaise and 1/4 teaspoon of baking powder into the batter base to replicate the chemical lift and tenderness.
- **Tenkasu and beni-shoga are cheap and widely available at Asian grocers.**  
These are crucial for the authentic flavor and texture, but if you absolutely cannot find tenkasu, a handful of plain crushed potato chips can mimic the fat and carb layering in a pinch.



# Classic Sukiyaki

すき焼き

*su-ki-ya-ki*

In Japan, sukiyaki is the ultimate communal meal—a payday celebration or a bulwark against a harsh winter night. You don't need a specialized burner or aristocratic Wagyu to capture the magic. The secret Japanese home cooks actually rely on is a simple mathematical ratio for the simmering sauce and a little bit of patience. We use the Eastern Kanto style of a pre-made broth, but borrow a grandmother's trick from the West: searing the aromatics and the first slices of beef in rendered fat to build a foundation before the liquid hits the pan. It is deeply nostalgic, utterly authentic, and surprisingly easy to pull off on a Tuesday night in a standard cast-iron skillet.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1/2 cup</b>	sake	<b>300 g</b>	firm tofu <i>cut into bite-sized dominoes and dry-fried until slightly browned</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	mirin		
<b>1/2 cup</b>	soy sauce	<b>200 g</b>	shirataki noodles <i>drained, boiled for 3 minutes, rinsed, and cut into 4-inch lengths</i>
<b>3 tbsp</b>	light brown sugar	<b>1 bunch</b>	shungiku <i>hard stems trimmed, cut into 2-inch lengths</i>
<b>1 lb</b>	thinly sliced ribeye	<b>1 pack</b>	shiitake mushrooms <i>tough stems removed, caps scored with a shallow X</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	beef fat	<b>1 pack</b>	enoki mushrooms <i>bottoms trimmed and pulled into small bundles</i>
<b>1 large</b>	leek <i>white and light green parts only, cut diagonally into 1/2-inch slices</i>	<b>1 pack</b>	enoki mushrooms <i>bottoms trimmed and pulled into small bundles</i>
<b>1/2 med</b>	Napa cabbage <i>cut into bite-sized squares, hard stems separated from leaves</i>	<b>4 large</b>	pasteurized eggs <i>lightly beaten in individual bowls for dipping</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Make the golden ratio warishita sauce.**

Combine the sake and mirin in a small saucepan. Bring to a rolling boil over medium heat for 2 minutes to evaporate the sharp alcohol bite. Lower the heat, stir in the soy sauce, and bring to a gentle simmer. Turn off the heat entirely, add the sugar, and stir gently until completely dissolved. Set aside.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Melt the beef fat in a wide cast-iron skillet over medium heat.**

As the fat melts, use chopsticks to rub it all over the bottom of the pan to create a slick, flavorful coating.

- 2. Sauté the leek slices until the edges are deeply charred and fragrant.**

Push the charred leeks to the side of the skillet to make room for the meat.

**1. Lay down a few large slices of beef in a single layer and sear for just ten to fifteen seconds.**

You want the bottom lightly browned. Once flipped, pour about half of your prepared warishita sauce directly over the seared beef and leeks where it will sizzle and bubble aggressively.

**2. Arrange the remaining ingredients neatly into distinct zones in the simmering sauce.**

Place the parboiled shirataki noodles in their own corner, and place the remaining raw beef on the exact opposite side of the pan. This is critical: the calcium in the noodles will ruin the texture of the meat if they touch.

**3. Simmer gently and top with the greens right before serving.**

Let the cabbage, mushrooms, and tofu simmer until the cabbage releases its water, perfectly diluting the salty sauce. Lay the delicate greens on top to wilt.

**4. Serve the skillet directly at the center of the table.**

Pluck hot morsels of beef and vegetables from the skillet and dip them briefly into your bowl of cool, beaten raw egg before eating immediately.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

● **Pasteurized eggs offer the authentic experience without the anxiety.**

Dipping scorching hot, salty-sweet beef into a cold, raw egg is the defining sensory experience of sukiyaki. Using pasteurized eggs in the shell eliminates the salmonella risk.

● **Never throw away the leftover broth.**

The remaining dark liquid is an incredibly complex elixir infused with beef fat and caramelized soy. Toss in pre-cooked thick udon noodles to simmer for a few minutes, or pour it over white rice the next day.



# Mille-Feuille Nabe

ミルフィーユ鍋

*mirufi-yu-nabe*

Don't let the fancy French name fool you. In Japan, this translates to 'a thousand leaves,' but it's really the ultimate lazy-night, comfort-food secret born of a broke college student's empty fridge. Western blogs will tell you to overcomplicate it with carrots, bok choy, and heavy chicken broths. Stop right there. Any Japanese grandmother will tell you the magic here is absolute restraint. Napa cabbage is ninety-five percent water. When tightly trapped in a pot with thinly sliced pork belly, they cook each other—the cabbage releases its sweet juices while the pork fat gently renders right into it. We use a low-water method, seasoned simply with sake and dashi, to coax a deeply savory,

concentrated broth out of practically nothing. It's remarkably cheap, it looks beautiful when it hits the table, and it tastes exactly like a cold winter night in Tokyo.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 large</b>	napa cabbage <i>separated into individual leaves and washed</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	Hondashi
<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	pork belly <i>sliced paper-thin (shabu-shabu cut)</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	water	<b>1/2 cup</b>	ponzu sauce
<b>1/4 cup</b>	sake	<b>2 med</b>	scallion <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	soy sauce	<b>1 tbsp</b>	yuzu kosho
		<b>1 cup</b>	cooked white rice <i>cold, for serving</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Build the mille-feuille layers.**

Lay one large cabbage leaf flat on a cutting board, arrange 2 to 3 slices of pork belly evenly over top, and cover with another cabbage leaf. Repeat until you have a stack of 4 leaves and 4 layers of pork, alternating the thick white stem ends with the thin green leafy ends so the stack remains level.

- **Cut the stacks into uniform sections.**

Using a sharp knife, cut the layered stack crosswise into 2-inch wide sections. Repeat the stacking and cutting process until you've processed all the cabbage and pork.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Pack the pot tightly.**

Grab a wide, shallow pot or a 10-inch enameled Dutch oven. Stand the cut cabbage and pork sections up inside the pot, cut-side up, so the layers of pink meat and white cabbage are fully visible. Start at the outside edge and pack them tightly in a concentric circle, working toward the center.

### 2. **Add the broth base.**

Whisk together the water, sake, soy sauce, Hondashi, and salt, then pour it evenly over the cabbage and pork. It will look like entirely too little liquid, but trust the process. The cabbage will release a massive amount of its own water as it cooks.

### 3. **Simmer gently using the low-water method.**

Place the pot over medium-high heat until you hear it bubbling and see steam rising. Immediately cover the pot with a lid, drop the heat to medium-low, and let it gently steam for 15 to 20 minutes until the pork is cooked through and the cabbage is incredibly tender.

### 4. **Serve directly from the pot.**

Bring the cooking vessel straight to the dining table. Pull the tender layers out with chopsticks, dunk them in individual bowls of ponzu sauce, and hit them with sliced scallions and a dab of yuzu kosho.

### 5. **Finish with the shime.**

When the meat and cabbage are gone, return the pot of deeply concentrated, pork-infused broth to the stove. Bring it to a boil, dump in the cold white rice, and simmer until hot for the best part of the meal.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Don't overcomplicate the pot.**

Adding extra vegetables like carrots or bok choy disrupts the architectural integrity of the thousand leaves and dilutes the pure synergy between the cabbage water and rendering pork fat.

- **Sourcing the right pork is critical.**

Hit up the local Asian market for pre-packaged shabu-shabu pork belly. If you strike out, ask your local butcher to run a fresh pork shoulder across their deli slicer to get it paper-thin. Thick American bacon will absolutely not work.

- **The pot must be packed tight.**

As the cabbage cooks and releases its water, it shrinks dramatically. If there is empty space in the pot, the beautiful layers will collapse into a messy soup.



# Tabletop Yakiniku

おうち焼肉

*ōchi yakiniku*

This isn't the neon-lit, sugar-soaked barbecue of Americanized steakhouses. This is what Japanese families actually cook on a weeknight. No smoke-filled kitchens, no over-complicated marinades masking subpar meat. It's about the primal, communal joy of searing unadorned cuts on a hot plate and plunging them into a bright, savory tare sweetened with grated apple. The secret is the exact temperature—keep the griddle at 400°F to get a flawless crust without smoking out your dining room. Squeeze the life out of your bean sprouts, take your time, and let the raw ingredients speak for themselves.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	boneless beef short rib <i>thinly sliced to 1/4-inch thick</i>	<b>3 1/2 med</b>	garlic clove <i>finely grated, divided</i>
<b>1/2 lb</b>	beef skirt steak <i>thinly sliced</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	fresh ginger <i>finely grated</i>
<b>1/2 lb</b>	uncured pork belly <i>thinly sliced</i>	<b>4 tbsp</b>	toasted sesame oil <i>divided</i>
<b>1 small</b>	Kabocha squash <i>seeded and cut into thin 1/4-inch wedges</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	toasted white sesame seeds <i>divided</i>
<b>1 large</b>	sweet onion <i>cut into 1/2-inch thick rounds</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	scallions <i>finely minced, white and light green parts only</i>
<b>2 med</b>	green bell peppers <i>deseeded and cut into wide strips</i>	<b>2 tsp</b>	granulated chicken bouillon <i>divided</i>
<b>1 pack</b>	shiitake mushrooms <i>sliced</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	fine sea salt
<b>1/2 cup</b>	Japanese soy sauce	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	mirin	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	fresh lemon juice
<b>1/4 cup</b>	sake	<b>12 oz</b>	mung bean sprouts <i>rinsed</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	brown sugar	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1/4 med</b>	Fuji apple <i>peeled and grated</i>	<b>4 cup</b>	steamed short-grain Japanese rice <i>cooked warm</i>
<b>1/4 med</b>	yellow onion <i>grated</i>		

## PREPARATION

- **Freeze the meat slightly before slicing.**

Mainstream supermarkets rarely slice meat thinly enough for yakiniku. If buying whole cuts, place the meat in the freezer for 45 minutes until firm, then shave it into 1/4-inch slices with your sharpest knife.

- **Arrange the raw ingredients on platters.**

Provide each diner with a pair of cooking tongs or dedicated cooking chopsticks to avoid cross-contamination with the raw meat.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Make the Apple-Soy Tare.**

In a small saucepan, combine the soy sauce, mirin, sake, brown sugar, grated apple, grated onion, 2 grated garlic cloves, and fresh ginger. Bring to a gentle boil over medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes to cook off the alcohol and soften the onion's bite. Remove from heat, stir in 1 tablespoon of sesame oil and 1 tablespoon of sesame seeds, and let cool.

### 2. **Mix the Negi-Shio Dare.**

In a small bowl, vigorously stir together the minced scallions, 2 tablespoons of sesame oil, 1 teaspoon of chicken bouillon, sea salt, black pepper, lemon juice, and a half clove of grated garlic. Let it sit for 15 minutes so the salt draws out the natural juices and softens the scallions into a relish.

### 3. **Prepare the Moyashi Namul.**

Microwave the bean sprouts in a loosely covered bowl on high for 3 minutes until just tender but still crunchy. Rinse briefly with cold water in a colander, then squeeze them firmly with your hands to extract as much water as possible. Toss the dry sprouts with 1 tablespoon of sesame oil, 1 teaspoon of chicken bouillon, 1 grated garlic clove, kosher salt, and 1 tablespoon of sesame seeds.

### 4. **Preheat the griddle to exactly 400°F.**

This is the golden rule of indoor yakiniku. It triggers the Maillard reaction for a perfect crust but stays below the point where animal fat vaporizes into thick smoke. Let the empty pan heat up for a full 5 minutes before cooking.

### 5. **Grill the meats and vegetables.**

Don't overcrowd the pan; stick to a few slices at a time. Sear the beef for 30 to 45 seconds per side, dip straight into the Apple-Soy Tare, and eat over steamed rice. Cook the pork belly until crisp, then top with a spoonful of the Negi-Shio sauce. Let the vegetables roast slowly in the corners to absorb the meat drippings.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Grate the apple.**

This classic grandmother's trick adds a gentle, fruity sweetness that sugar alone cannot replicate, while naturally thickening the tare so it clings to the meat.

- **Do not skip squeezing the bean sprouts.**

If you don't wring the excess water out of the blanched sprouts, your namul will end up a soggy, diluted mess.

- **Source the right bouillon.**

Granulated chicken bouillon, known as torigara soup in Japanese markets, provides a cleaner umami than Western chicken stock cubes. Knorr chicken bouillon powder works well as an alternative.



# Football Sushi & Temari Bombs

いなり寿司と手まり寿司

*inarizushi to temarizushi*

If you grew up in a Japanese-American household, you didn't call them inarizushi; you called them football sushi. They were the chubby, umami-soaked tofu pockets that anchored every New Year's potluck. Beside them belong Temari bombs, jewel-like Kyoto spheres originally engineered so geishas could eat without smudging their lipstick. Both are spectacular accompaniments for a weekend hot pot because they can be made entirely in advance. The secret to the footballs is a

technique called *aburanuki*, boiling the excess oil from the tofu pockets so they become sponges for a sweet soy broth. The *Temari* rely on a decidedly unglamorous grandma trick: standard plastic wrap.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 cup</b>	Japanese short-grain sushi rice <i>rinsed until water runs clear and drained</i>	<b>4 tbsp</b>	soy sauce
<b>1 7/8 cup</b>	water	<b>4 tbsp</b>	brown sugar
<b>4 tbsp</b>	rice vinegar	<b>2 tbsp</b>	mirin
<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	white sugar	<b>4 small</b>	smoked salmon <i>sliced thin</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>4 small</b>	prosciutto <i>sliced thin</i>
<b>8 med</b>	abura-age <i>cut in half crosswise to form pockets</i>	<b>1 small</b>	cucumber <i>sliced paper-thin and tossed with a pinch of salt to soften</i>
<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	dashi	<b>1 tbsp</b>	assorted garnishes <i>capers, tiny dill sprigs, or toasted sesame seeds</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Mix the dashi.**

If you are using instant dashi powder instead of homemade stock, simply dissolve one teaspoon of powder into one and a half cups of warm water.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Cook the rice with slightly less water than usual.**

Cook the short-grain rice using a little less water than standard to ensure it can absorb the vinegar later without turning mushy.

**1. Fold the vinegar mixture into the hot rice.**

Dissolve the rice vinegar, white sugar, and salt together, then pour over the cooked rice in a wide bowl, folding gently with a slicing motion while fanning it to room temperature.

**2. Extract the oil from the tofu pockets.**

Boil the halved abura-age in a pot of water for three minutes to purge their oxidized frying oil, then drain, rinse with cold water, and squeeze out the excess moisture like a delicate sponge.

**3. Simmer the pockets in the savory broth.**

In a wide pan, combine the dashi, soy sauce, brown sugar, and mirin, add the tofu pockets, and simmer on medium-low for twenty minutes until the liquid is almost entirely absorbed.

**4. Cool the pockets entirely in the pan.**

Turn off the heat and let the pockets cool completely in the residual syrup, which is the exact moment they actually absorb their deep flavor.

**5. Stuff the footballs with seasoned rice.**

Gently squeeze any dripping broth from the cooled pockets, then tuck about three tablespoons of sushi rice into the corners of each to form a chubby football shape.

**6. Shape the Temari bombs using plastic wrap.**

Lay a six-inch square of plastic wrap on the counter, place a garnish and a piece of salmon, prosciutto, or cucumber face down in the center, and add one heaping tablespoon of sushi rice.

**7. Twist the wrap to compress the sphere.**

Pull the corners of the plastic wrap together and twist tightly right above the rice to form a seamless, perfectly round ball, leaving them wrapped until ready to serve.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Prepare the Temari toppings properly.**

The trick to a perfect Temari bomb is pliability. Stiff cuts of fish or vegetables will pop off the rice, which is why cucumbers must be salted to soften and proteins must be sliced extremely thin.



# Teppan Foil-Yaki

鮭のホイル焼き

*sake no hoiru-yaki*

Growing up, the appearance of the electric hot plate on the dining room table meant two things: it was the weekend, and you were cooking together. Hoiru-yaki is a genius byproduct of post-war Japanese ingenuity, a micro-pressure cooker crafted from aluminum foil that yields perfectly tender salmon and leaves zero pans to scrub. The secret to making this taste exactly like your mother's kitchen is a Showa-era holy trinity of soy sauce, sake, and butter. It is pure, unadulterated comfort, cooked gently in its own umami-rich steam.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/4 lb</b>	salmon fillets <i>cut into 4 equal pieces, skin-on, pin bones removed</i>	<b>4 tsp</b>	sake
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>4 tsp</b>	soy sauce
<b>1 small</b>	yellow onion <i>halved and very thinly sliced</i>	<b>4 tbsp</b>	unsalted butter <i>divided into 4 pats</i>
<b>2 cup</b>	mixed Japanese mushrooms <i>shimeji trimmed and separated, enoki roots trimmed and pulled into small bundles</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	neutral oil
		<b>2 med</b>	scallions <i>thinly sliced</i>
		<b>1 med</b>	lemon <i>cut into wedges</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Prep the packets ahead of time.**

For busy weeknights, these foil packets can be entirely assembled, sealed, and left in the refrigerator for up to 12 hours before cooking.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Purge the salmon to remove excess moisture and fishy odors.**

Sprinkle the salmon fillets lightly with the kosher salt on both sides and let them sit at room temperature for 10 to 15 minutes, then gently but thoroughly pat them completely dry with a paper towel.

- 2. Prepare the foil packets.**

Lay out four 12-inch squares of heavy-duty aluminum foil and lightly dab the center of each with a drop of oil to prevent sticking.

- 3. Layer the aromatics, protein, and fungi.**

Divide the sliced onions evenly in the center of each foil sheet to create a protective trivet, place a salmon fillet skin-side down on top of the onions, and scatter the prepared mushrooms over and around the fish.

**1. Apply the seasoning trinity.**

Drizzle exactly one teaspoon of sake and one teaspoon of soy sauce over the contents of each packet, then place a one-tablespoon pat of butter directly on top of the salmon.

**2. Seal the packets hermetically.**

Bring the top and bottom edges of the foil together and fold over tightly a few times to create a secure seam, then crimp the ends inward to trap the steam while leaving a small pocket of air for expansion.

**3. Steam-bake the packets in a water bath on the teppan.**

Preheat an electric hot plate or large skillet to medium heat, place the sealed packets directly on the surface, pour about two tablespoons of water onto the hot plate around the packets, and quickly cover with a lid.

**4. Cook undisturbed until the packets balloon with steam.**

Let the fish steam-bake for 10 to 12 minutes, allowing the external water to moderate the heat while the sake and vegetable juices cook the fish from within.

**5. Open carefully and garnish.**

Transfer the hot packets to individual plates, open cautiously to avoid the hot steam, and garnish with sliced scallions and a squeeze of fresh lemon.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **You can easily adapt this into the regional Hokkaido Chanchan Yaki.**

Swap the mushrooms for a large handful of chopped cabbage and matchstick carrots, and replace the soy sauce with a paste made of one tablespoon miso, one teaspoon sugar, and one teaspoon sake.

● **A conventional oven works perfectly if you do not have a hot plate.**

Place the sealed foil packets on a rimmed baking sheet and bake at 400 degrees Fahrenheit for 12 to 15 minutes.





# The Nikkei Heritage Table: Potlucks & Holidays

*Honoring the adaptive, resilient culinary history of Japanese Americans through community potlucks and holiday traditions.*

A diaspora doesn't survive without learning to bend the rules. The Nikkei table is a testament to that beautiful, stubborn resilience—a glorious collision of ancestral memory and American grocery store reality. This isn't the delicate, hyper-seasonal kaiseki of the homeland. It's the folding tables at the community

church potluck groaning under the weight of diasporic Asian slaw and foil trays of Hawaiian-born Spam musubi. It's a Thanksgiving turkey bathed unapologetically in a sticky teriyaki glaze.

Holidays here are about making do, and making it better. The New Year's Oshogatsu is stripped of its exhausting pomp, boiled down to the absolute essentials: a soul-warming bowl of ozoni and a handful of sweet black soybeans for good luck. It's the honest, enduring food of a people who took what they had, remembered where they came from, and built something entirely, deliciously their own.





# Classic Nikkei Ozoni

お雑煮

*o-zō-ni*

For the Japanese-American diaspora, New Year's Day is anchored by the smell of toasted mochi and the rich, savory steam rising from a bowl of clear-broth ozoni. This is the canonical Kanto-style soup that sustained generations of Nikkei families in the Midwest and on the coasts, relying entirely on the fundamental, harmonious umami of dashi and soy sauce. It is a masterclass in making a few simple, accessible ingredients taste like absolute magic. The secret from grandma's kitchen is simple: toast the mochi until it puffs dramatically, meticulously skim the broth, and never skip the tiny sliver of citrus peel at the end.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>4 cup</b>	water	<b>4 med</b>	kirimochi
<b>1 med</b>	dried kombu <i>cut into a 4x4-inch square</i>	<b>2 med</b>	daikon radish <i>peeled and cut into 1/4-inch half-moons</i>
<b>15 g</b>	katsuobushi	<b>1/2 med</b>	carrot <i>peeled and cut into 1/4-inch rounds</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	soy sauce	<b>2 med</b>	dried shiitake mushrooms <i>rehydrated in warm water, stems removed, caps thinly sliced</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	sake	<b>4 oz</b>	fresh spinach <i>washed</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	mirin	<b>4 small</b>	kamaboko <i>cut into thin slices</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>4 small</b>	lemon peel <i>cut into tiny slivers, avoiding the bitter white pith</i>
<b>1/2 lb</b>	boneless skinless chicken thighs <i>cut into bite-sized pieces</i>		

## PREPARATION

- **Blanch the spinach to protect the broth.**

Bring a small pot of water to a boil, drop in the spinach for 30 seconds, then immediately shock it in a bowl of ice water. Squeeze out all excess water, form into a tight log, and cut into 2-inch lengths. Boiling the spinach separately prevents the soup from turning a muddy green color.

- **Parboil the root vegetables.**

In the same boiling water, add the sliced carrots and daikon. Boil for 2 to 3 minutes until they are just tender enough to be pierced with a fork, then drain and set aside.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Steep the dashi broth.

In a medium pot, combine the water and kombu over medium heat. Right before the water comes to a rolling boil, remove and discard the kombu. Add the katsuobushi, turn the heat down to a gentle simmer, and steep for 3 minutes before straining the broth through a fine-mesh sieve into a clean pot.

### 2. Simmer the chicken and mushrooms.

Bring the strained clear broth to a gentle simmer and add the soy sauce, sake, mirin, and salt. Drop in the bite-sized chicken pieces and sliced shiitake mushrooms.

### 3. Skim the broth meticulously.

Simmer gently for 4 to 5 minutes until the chicken is cooked through. Meticulously use a spoon to skim off any white foam that rises to the surface—this technique is absolutely crucial for a beautiful, crystal-clear soup.

### 4. Warm the vegetables and fish cake.

Lower the heat to keep the soup warm. Add the parboiled carrots, daikon, and kamaboko slices just long enough to heat them through.

### 5. Toast the mochi.

Place the hard kirimochi squares in a toaster oven or on a dry cast-iron skillet over medium-low heat. Toast them for about 5 minutes, flipping occasionally, until they puff up dramatically and develop a deeply golden-brown, crispy exterior.

### 6. Assemble the bowls.

Place one hot, puffed mochi square into the bottom of each serving bowl. Ladle the hot broth and solids over the mochi, top with a neat stack of the blanched spinach, and drop a single tiny sliver of lemon peel into the hot liquid right before serving.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **The weeknight dashi shortcut.**

While making dashi from scratch takes only a few minutes, first-generation Nikkei parents frequently relied on instant Hondashi for convenience. To use this historically validated shortcut, simply dissolve 2 teaspoons of Hondashi granules in 4 cups of boiling water, skipping the kombu and katsuobushi entirely.

- **The microwave mochi hack.**

If a toaster oven is unavailable, you can place the mochi in a microwave-safe bowl, cover it entirely with water, and microwave on high for 60 to 90 seconds until it softens into a highly sticky, molten state. You lose the toasted flavor, but it perfectly mimics the boiled Kansai-style texture in a pinch.



# Auntie's Kamaboko Dip with Ritz Crackers

かまぼこディップ

*kamaboko dippu*

You won't find this on a menu in Tokyo. Born in the kitchens of Japanese immigrants and their descendants in Hawaii and the West Coast, this dip is the ultimate testament to diaspora ingenuity. It is a brilliant, unpretentious marriage of traditional steamed fish cake and mid-century American supermarket staples. Served at every potluck alongside a sleeve of buttery Ritz Crackers, it requires zero cooking, comes together in ten minutes, and tastes exactly like home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>6 oz</b>	kamaboko (pink and white Japanese steamed fish cake) <i>removed from wooden base</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	green onions <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	full-fat cream cheese <i>softened to room temperature</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	canned water chestnuts <i>finely diced</i>
<b>1/3 cup</b>	Best Foods or Hellmann's mayonnaise	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	hondashi (Japanese dashi powder)
		<b>1/4 tsp</b>	kosher salt
		<b>1 box</b>	Ritz Crackers

## PREPARATION

- **Firm up the kamaboko in the freezer.**

If the fish cake is too soft to grate cleanly, place it in the freezer for 15 minutes before starting.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Grate the fish cake using the large holes of a box grater.**  
Resist the urge to use a food processor, as manual grating yields the feathery shreds essential to the traditional texture.
- 2. Vigorously mix the softened cream cheese and mayonnaise in a medium bowl until completely smooth.**  
Make sure the cream cheese is truly at room temperature to avoid a lumpy dip.
- 3. Gently fold the kamaboko, water chestnuts, green onions, hondashi, and salt into the dairy mixture.**  
Mix just until the ingredients are evenly distributed.
- 4. Cover and chill in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes.**  
Patience pays off, as resting allows the sharp alliums and deep umami of the hondashi to permeate the cream cheese.

**1. Serve chilled surrounded by a generous stack of Ritz Crackers.**

Garnish with a pinch of leftover green onions. The buttery crunch of the Ritz is canonical, so accept no substitutes.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Do not use Japanese mayonnaise.**

Kewpie is fantastic, but it's too sweet and rich here. Standard American mayonnaise is the undisputed secret to achieving that authentic diaspora flavor.

● **Imitation crab makes a flawless substitute.**

If you can't find kamaboko at your local Asian market, finely shredded surimi maintains the necessary umami and texture.

● **The dashi is negotiable.**

Hondashi adds a deep savory backbone, but if you don't have it, a tiny splash of soy sauce or a pinch of garlic salt works just fine.



## The Diasporic Ramen Cabbage Salad

Long before ramen salads became a health food trend, Japanese-American internment survivors were ingeniously recreating the sweet, tangy, umami-rich flavors of the motherland with whatever mid-century American supermarkets had to offer. It is the ultimate story of diaspora cooking. Cheap instant ramen is crushed raw into a cabbage slaw to act as aggressively crunchy, savory croutons. It is unpretentious, scales up beautifully for potlucks, and delivers that unmistakable, nostalgic bite of a family reunion.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 med</b>	green cabbage <i>finely shredded, or substitute two 14-oz bags of coleslaw mix</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	toasted sesame oil
<b>4 med</b>	green onions <i>thinly sliced, white and green parts</i>	<b>6 tbsp</b>	rice vinegar
<b>1/2 cup</b>	slivered almonds	<b>1/4 cup</b>	white sugar
<b>2 tbsp</b>	white sesame seeds	<b>1 small</b>	ramen seasoning packet <i>reserved from the instant ramen noodles</i>
<b>6 oz</b>	instant ramen noodles <i>flavor packets reserved, noodles left uncooked</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	neutral vegetable oil	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt

## PREPARATION

- **Shred the cabbage.**

If not using pre-bagged coleslaw mix, finely shred the green cabbage with a sharp knife or mandoline.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toast the nuts and seeds.**

Place a dry skillet over medium-low heat and toast the almonds until deeply golden, adding the sesame seeds in the last thirty seconds to warm them through.

- 2. Combine the fresh vegetables.**

Toss the shredded cabbage and sliced green onions together in the largest mixing bowl you own.

- 3. Emulsify the vinaigrette.**

Whisk the rice vinegar, sugar, salt, black pepper, and exactly one ramen flavor packet together until completely dissolved, then slowly whisk in the neutral and sesame oils until thick.

**1. Crush the dry noodles.**

Keep the ramen blocks in their plastic packaging and use your hands or a rolling pin to crush them into bite-sized pieces.

**2. Toss immediately before serving.**

Pour the dressing over the cabbage and toss to coat, then gently mix in the toasted almonds, sesame seeds, and crushed ramen right before eating to preserve the crunch.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Timing is everything.**

Do not mix the noodles into the dressed cabbage until just before serving or they will absorb the vinaigrette and turn soggy.

● **Adjusting the seasoning.**

If you prefer to skip the ramen packet, substitute one tablespoon of soy sauce and one teaspoon of chicken bouillon powder in the dressing.

● **Make it a meal.**

Fold in two cups of shredded rotisserie chicken or chilled, pan-fried tofu cubes during the final toss to turn this side dish into a weeknight main.



# JA Heritage Somen Salad

そうめんサラダ

*sōmen sarada*

Native Japanese cooks might treat leftover somen as a minimalist summer lunch, but the diaspora elevated it into a vibrant, chilled noodle casserole. This dish is a testament to the cross-cultural ingenuity of immigrant grandmothers, pairing the delicate snap of traditional wheat noodles with the unapologetic, savory convenience of SPAM, bright vegetables, and an addictive sweet-soy vinaigrette. It requires almost no actual cooking, making it a perfectly nostalgic, cooling savior for a busy weeknight.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1/2 cup</b>	soy sauce	<b>1/2 med</b>	iceberg lettuce <i>finely shredded</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	neutral oil	<b>2 large</b>	eggs
<b>1/3 cup</b>	unseasoned rice vinegar	<b>3 oz</b>	kamaboko <i>julienned</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	granulated sugar	<b>6 oz</b>	SPAM <i>julienned</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	toasted sesame oil	<b>1 med</b>	carrot <i>peeled and julienned into matchsticks</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	toasted sesame seeds	<b>1 small</b>	Japanese cucumber <i>julienned</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	MSG	<b>3 med</b>	scallions <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>9 oz</b>	dried somen noodles		

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Build the sweet-soy vinaigrette.

In a mason jar with a tight-fitting lid, combine the soy sauce, neutral oil, rice vinegar, sugar, sesame oil, sesame seeds, and MSG. Shake vigorously until the sugar fully dissolves, then stash it in the fridge to chill.

### 2. Cook and slice the egg ribbons.

Beat the eggs with a pinch of salt. Heat a lightly oiled non-stick skillet over low heat, pour in the eggs to form a very thin omelet, and cook until just set. Once cool, roll it tightly like a cigar and slice it into delicate ribbons.

### 3. Pan-fry the SPAM.

In the same skillet over medium heat, fry the julienned SPAM until the edges are golden and crispy, then set aside to cool.

**1. Boil, shock, and aggressively rinse the somen.**

Bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil and drop in the noodles for exactly two to three minutes. The moment they are tender, drain them and immediately run under cold water, rubbing the noodles vigorously with your bare hands to strip away the surface starch until the water runs clear.

**2. Dry the noodles completely.**

Drain the chilled noodles exceptionally well, pressing them gently with paper towels to ensure absolutely no excess water remains to dilute your salad.

**3. Assemble the chilled noodle casserole.**

In a 9x13-inch baking pan or a large, shallow serving platter, spread the somen into an even bottom layer, followed by a blanket of the shredded lettuce.

**4. Layer the toppings.**

Arrange the julienned kamaboko, crispy SPAM, carrot matchsticks, cucumber, and egg ribbons in colorful rows over the lettuce, finishing with a scatter of sliced scallions.

**5. Delay the dressing until the absolute last minute.**

Keep the salad covered in the refrigerator. Only pour the dressing over the top and toss immediately prior to serving, ensuring the noodles remain springy and distinct rather than bloated and soggy.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Substituting the kamaboko.**

If you cannot find the iconic pink-edged Japanese fish cake at your local Asian market, shredded imitation crab sticks (surimi) are an entirely authentic and accepted diaspora substitution.

● **Making the dressing ahead.**

The vinaigrette only gets better as the flavors meld. You can mix it up to a week in advance and keep it sealed in the refrigerator.



# Hawaiian-Japanese Spam Musubi

スパムむすび

*supamu musubi*

If there is a single dish that captures the beautiful, unapologetic alchemy of the Japanese-American diaspora, it is Spam musubi. Born from wartime necessity and Hawaiian ingenuity, it is the ultimate comfort food for first-generation kids who grew up miles away from the islands but knew the unmistakable scent of pork rendering in sweet soy sauce. Forget the fussy, internet-chef impulse to add sushi vinegar; authentic grandma magic relies entirely on the stark, perfect contrast between a salty, caramelized slab of meat and a warm,

unseasoned brick of plain white rice. You do not even need special equipment—just save the empty tin to press the rice, wrap it in seaweed, and take a bite of history.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 cup</b>	medium-grain white rice <i>rinsed well</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	sugar
<b>12 oz</b>	Spam Lite <i>removed from can (save the tin) and cut lengthwise into 8 even slices</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	mirin
<b>1/4 cup</b>	soy sauce	<b>3 large</b>	roasted seaweed sheets <i>cut into 2-inch wide strips</i>
		<b>2 tbsp</b>	furikake

## PREPARATION

- **Cook the plain white rice.**

Cook the rinsed rice according to your machine's instructions, ensuring it stays warm and absolutely unseasoned.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Wash and line the empty Spam can.**

Rinse the empty tin thoroughly, dry it, and line the inside with a large piece of plastic wrap, leaving plenty draping over the edges to act as handles.

- 2. Whisk together the soy sauce, sugar, and mirin.**

Stir them together in a small bowl until the sugar is mostly dissolved to create your teriyaki glaze.

- 3. Pan-fry the Spam slices in a dry skillet until crispy.**

Lay the pork in a single layer over medium-high heat, letting its own fat render out until both sides are deeply browned, about two to three minutes per side.

- 1. Deglaze the pan to coat the meat in a thick, sweet syrup.**  
Turn the heat down to medium-low, pour the soy mixture directly over the hot pork, and let it bubble rapidly until it reduces and clings tightly to the meat.
- 2. Pack the warm rice firmly into the lined tin.**  
Scoop about three-quarters of a cup of warm rice into the can, wetting your fingers slightly to pack it down firmly into a tight, solid brick without turning the grains to mush.
- 3. Layer the furikake and glazed pork over the rice.**  
Sprinkle the pressed rice with a pinch of furikake, top it with a slice of glazed Spam, then pull the plastic wrap straight up to lift the stacked block cleanly out of the tin.
- 4. Bind the musubi tightly with a strip of seaweed.**  
Place the unwrapped rice and meat stack onto the center of a shiny-side-down seaweed strip, fold the ends over to overlap, and seal the seam with a single drop of water.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Wrap tightly to store.**  
If making these ahead for a lunchbox or potluck weeknight meal, wrap each warm musubi individually in plastic wrap so the steam slightly softens the nori—which is exactly how the locals eat it in Hawaii.



# Thanksgiving Teriyaki Turkey Tsukune

ふわふわターキーつくね

*fuwa-fuwa tākī tsukune*

When Japanese families settled in the American Midwest, they brought the ancient culinary philosophies of washoku to the suburban supermarket. Faced with a November deluge of lean ground turkey, first-generation grandmothers didn't compromise; they adapted. By working drained tofu into the meat and swapping hard-to-find chicken cartilage for minced raw onion, they engineered a dish that effortlessly bridges two worlds. This isn't the hyper-sweet, garlic-heavy mall food court teriyaki you grew up dreading. It is impossibly fluffy, gently

crunchy, and lacquered in a pure four-ingredient glaze—the unadulterated, nostalgic taste of a Japanese home kitchen, optimized for a Tuesday night in Ohio.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	ground turkey	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral oil
<b>7 oz</b>	firm tofu	<b>3 tbsp</b>	soy sauce
<b>1/2 med</b>	yellow onion <i>very finely minced</i>	<b>3 tbsp</b>	mirin
<b>1 large</b>	egg	<b>3 tbsp</b>	sake
<b>2 tbsp</b>	potato starch	<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	granulated sugar
<b>1 tsp</b>	fresh ginger <i>grated</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	toasted white sesame seeds <i>for garnish</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>2 med</b>	scallions <i>sliced, for garnish</i>
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper	<b>4 large</b>	egg yolks <i>pasteurized, for dipping</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	toasted sesame oil		

## PREPARATION

- **Extract moisture from the tofu.**

Wrap the half-block of firm tofu in two layers of thick paper towels or a clean kitchen cloth, place it on a plate with a heavy object on top, and let it sit for 15 to 20 minutes to press out the excess water.

- **Mash the pressed tofu.**

Once pressed, unwrap the tofu and use your hands or a fork to mash it into a fine crumble.

- **Mix the glaze.**

In a small bowl, whisk together the soy sauce, mirin, sake, and granulated sugar until the sugar is mostly dissolved.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Emulsify the meat mixture.**

In a large mixing bowl, combine the ground turkey, mashed tofu, minced onion, whole egg, potato starch, grated ginger, salt, pepper, and toasted sesame oil. Mix vigorously with your hands, making a claw shape with your fingers and stirring in a circular motion until the mixture becomes pale, highly sticky, and forms a cohesive paste.

### 2. **Form the tsukune.**

Lightly coat your hands with a drop of cooking oil or water to prevent sticking, scoop about two heaping tablespoons of the meat mixture, and gently toss it back and forth between your palms to knock out any air bubbles before shaping into slightly flattened oval patties.

### 3. **Sear to develop a crust.**

Heat the neutral oil in a large non-stick skillet over medium heat, carefully arrange the tsukune in the pan, and cook undisturbed for 3 to 4 minutes until the undersides develop a deep, golden-brown crust.

### 4. **Steam-fry the meatballs.**

Carefully flip the meatballs, immediately cover the pan with a tight-fitting lid, and reduce the heat to medium-low. Let them steam-fry for 4 to 5 minutes so the moisture from the tofu steams the lean turkey gently without drying it out.

### 5. **Prepare the pan for glazing.**

Remove the lid and wipe away any excess grease or liquid pooled in the pan with a bunched-up paper towel held by tongs.

### 6. **Apply the teriyaki glaze.**

Turn the heat up to medium-high and pour the teriyaki glaze directly into the pan. As the liquids reduce and bubble furiously, continually baste and roll the meatballs around until they are lacquered in a sticky, glossy sauce that coats the back of a spoon.

## 1. **Garnish and serve.**

Transfer the tsukune to a serving platter, drizzle with any remaining syrup from the pan, and garnish with toasted sesame seeds and sliced scallions. Serve alongside a small bowl containing a raw egg yolk for dipping.

### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not skip draining the tofu.**

If you leave the water in, your meatballs will fall apart in the pan. Pressing the tofu ensures it absorbs the savory turkey juices rather than leaking water into your glaze.

- **Embrace the potato starch.**

Unlike Italian-American meatballs that rely on milk-soaked breadcrumbs, authentic tsukune utilizes katakuriko (potato starch). It gelatinizes inside the meatball, acting as an internal hydrocolloid that traps the juices so the lean turkey never dries out.

- **The secret to the shine is real mirin.**

The characteristic glossy finish, or 'teri', of a true Japanese glaze relies entirely on the unique sugar structures found in genuine mirin. Avoid substitutions if you want the authentic lacquered texture.