

# Japanese Culture & Cooking



**No other cooking in the world places so much importance on the process of preparation and presentation as the Japanese. It is not the ingredients, seasonings or cooking techniques that make Japanese food so unique. It is the appearance and presentation of the food that sets it apart from other cuisines. Every dish is prepared to give as much pleasure to the eyes as the mouth. This is why so much importance is given to the bowls and plates the food is served on.**

- ◆ The food that Japanese people have eaten at home for the last thousand years is very simple and very good for you. The three main dishes in a meal are rice, miso soup, and pickles.
- ◆ A formal Japanese meal has lots of courses, some only a mouthful or two. Sometimes a whole fish is served, grilled or deep-fried. More often the ingredients are cooked in individual bite-sized morsels. Japanese food is eaten with chopsticks so the small servings are easy to eat.
- ◆ The Japanese culture is reflected in the diet. The farming and fishing communities, government and urban life all play a role in the foods they eat. Each region of the country retains its own local food specialties.
- ◆ Rice is produced in rural areas, delivered to the whole country and eaten up to three times a day.
- ◆ Wild plants, mushrooms, fruit or nuts are eaten in the city and in the rural areas.
- ◆ Few spices are used in cooking; the most popular seasoning is shoyu (soy sauce).
- ◆ The Buddhist ban on eating animal food led to vegetarian cooking based around tofu and other soy based products.
- ◆ Cooking stocks made from konbu seaweed, shitake mushrooms, and katsuobushi (prepared bonito fish) are important for flavor.
- ◆ Sushi and noodles developed as urban “fast” foods. Western foods are common, especially in cities, but the simple Japanese diet is eaten in rural areas.

## **Principles of Japanese Cooking:**

Japanese foods change with the season. Each season is celebrated with special dishes. Rice with fresh green peas is a summer dish, while Harvest Rice with its freshly harvested rice and mushrooms welcomes the onset of fall. Not only do the foods change, but there are also seasonal

changes in cooking methods and garnishes. Using seasonal ingredients means the freshest ingredients are available at their peak and at the best prices.

- ◆ Japanese food is healthy; Japanese people eat a lot of fish, vegetables, seaweeds and soy bean products.
- ◆ Soup stocks are often made of dried fish and seaweed.
- ◆ Japanese cooking does not use much oil. The main idea when cooking Japanese food is to allow the natural flavor of the ingredients to come out. They use vegetables in-season and ideally when they are fresh. Raw fish, called sashimi, is more of a delicacy than cooked fish.
- ◆ The beverage of choice in Japan is green tea. The “Tea Ceremony” is a custom that dates back to 800AD, when the Buddhist monks returned to Japan bringing this tea with them as a medicinal beverage.



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