

FRUIT

Handcrafted gems with eye-catching shapes and colors

Spring, summer, autumn, and winter in Japan each produce different types of fruit, meaning that all sorts of wonderful taste sensations can be experienced throughout the year. By savoring the natural flavor of fresh fruit each season, Japanese partake of the pleasures afforded by the passing of the seasons. Improvements continue to be made to cultivation techniques, producing a steady stream of enhancements to flavor, shape, and color. No effort is spared to raise quality, with some growers taking the time to cover fruit on trees with protective bags. As such, Japan's beautiful, high-quality fruit can be thought of as handcrafted gems. Native species include persimmons and Japanese pears, and peaches are old-timers as well, as evidenced by their appearance in the eighth century *Kojiki*, the oldest chronicle of Japanese history.



Covered Japanese pears in an orchard
After Japanese pears reach a certain size, growers cover each and every one with a bag to protect them from heavy rain, strong winds, insects, and other foes, resulting in beautiful, unblemished produce.

春

Spring



Strawberries

Treasure houses of vitamin C that enhance health and beauty

Rich in vitamin C, Japan's fragrant, strongly sweet strawberries are very popular treats both raw and in such processed forms as jam and jelly.



Cherries

Lovely orbs with delicate flavor

Cast in a lustrous, beautiful hue, Japanese cherries offer a refined, unadorned sweetness and an abundance of minerals. High-grade varieties are carefully packed one by one in boxes that make for welcome gifts.

Peaches

Juicy, luscious fruit best enjoyed raw

Popular as gifts because of their dainty beauty, Japanese peaches are noted for their soft, juicy flesh, and intense sweetness and fragrance. Peaches are a good source of fiber.



Watermelons

Tasty, chilled fruit that beats the summer heat

Sweet, succulent watermelons are synonymous with summer in Japan, and are especially tasty when chilled. Offering a distinctive taste sensation with their intricate flesh, watermelons also have a strong diuretic effect, making them good for people concerned about swelling, kidney trouble, or high blood pressure.



Summer

夏



Japanese pears

Unparalleled juiciness

Compared with European pears, which are often used in processed form, Japanese pears are very succulent, making them very delicious when eaten raw. They also offer a pleasant, distinctive crispness, and are rich in fiber.



Melons

The sweetness-packed king of fruit

Considered by many to be the superlative fruit, melons are a big item in Japan, pleasing the senses with their melt-in-the-mouth sweetness and elegant aroma. Chilling increases the sweetness, enhancing the flavor.

秋

Autumn

Grapes

A delightful assortment of flavors and fragrances

What makes Japanese grapes special is that many varieties are grown, allowing all sorts of flavors and fragrances to be experienced. The polyphenols in grapes are believed to combat lifestyle-related illnesses and slow down aging of the skin.



Persimmons

A long-time favorite in Japan

Soft, distinctly sweet persimmons contain an ample amount of vitamin C, as well as tannin, which is said to be good for relieving hangovers. One of the great pleasures of late autumn in Japan is persimmons that have been peeled and dried outdoors.



Winter

冬



Apples

A wholesome treat that's especially tasty when eaten whole

Japan's apples come in abundant varieties that provide a continuum of flavor from powerfully sweet to crisply tart, and their eye-catching shapes and colors have earned acclaim from around the world. In addition to aiding digestion, apples hold a rich supply of nutrients that makes them good for staying healthy and relieving fatigue.



Tangerines

Sweet symbols of winter in Japan

Easily peeled and devoid of seeds, tangerines make for a quick-to-eat snack that is succulently sweet. Tangerines are always found on Japanese tabletops in winter, partly because of their copious vitamin C, which helps ward off colds.

SEAFOOD

The starting point of Japanese cuisine

As inhabitants of a long island chain, Japanese have made fish and shellfish a key part of their diet from time immemorial, building up a distinctive culture of seafood over the centuries. Today, many different methods are used to prepare the diverse bounty of fish that each season brings, allowing a spectrum of flavors to be enjoyed throughout the year. This frequent consumption of seafood is also believed to be one of the secrets behind Japanese longevity, and the world is now turning its attention to seafood as a low-fat, low-calorie diet offering abundant nutrients that can help prevent lifestyle-related diseases.

Different ways to make a tasty seafood meal



Sashimi

Fresh, raw seafood sliced thin and served with such seasonings as soy sauce mixed with *wasabi* or ginger, *sashimi* originated as a simple meal for fishermen while out at sea. Along with the spread of soy sauce, *sashimi* evolved into a lavish dish also enjoyed at home. Satisfying both the palate and the eyes, *sashimi* is recognized around the world as a classic example of Japanese cuisine.

Examples of fish good for sashimi


Tuna, sea bream, flounder, bonito, yellowtail, sardine, horse mackerel





Horse mackerel

Typical method of preparing sashimi

Wild horse mackerel sashimi

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Scale and gut the fish, and remove the head. Spread open the body to cut out the central bone, and extract the small bones with a bone picker.
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Sprinkle salt on the fish and let it sit for a moment. Rinse it with water and then dip the entire body in vinegar water. After peeling the skin by hand and making decorative incisions across the flesh, cut the fish into small slices.
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Arrange the slices on a plate and garnish with grated ginger, decorative leaves, etc.

Grilling

Fish grilled over an open flame is another common feature of Japanese cuisine, representing a broad spectrum ranging from homemade dishes to masterpieces created at posh restaurants. Before grilling, fish is seasoned in various ways, such as sprinkling salt on it, coating it with a soy sauce-based dressing, or marinating it in *miso*.

Examples of fish good for grilling


Red sea bream, parrot fish, mackerel, horse mackerel, sardine, saury





Salmon

Typical method of grilling

Grilled salted salmon

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Sprinkle salt on slices of salmon and let them sit for a while.
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Grill both sides of the slices over an open flame.
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Arrange them on a plate and garnish with slices of lemon or lime.

Sea delicacies other than fish

Abalones

One of the sea's finest delicacies, abalones are univalves that have a saucer-shaped shell. Offering a distinctively firm texture, abalones are served raw in *sashimi* and *sushi*, steamed in *sake*, grilled whole, and prepared in other ways.



Sharkfin

The tail and dorsal fins of large sharks are dried for use as a luxury ingredient for dishes. After preparation and simmering, sharkfin becomes a pleasantly soft, gelatinous substance. Japan is one of the world's top producers of sharkfin.



Scallops

Featuring a large adductor muscle, these bivalves have thick, flavorful flesh that is sliced into *sashimi*, fried in butter, stewed with other ingredients, and used in soup.



Roasted laver

A very familiar part of the Japanese diet, these thin sheets of dried seaweed are used in different ways, such as to wrap *sushi* rolls, rice balls, or roasted rice cakes.



Tidbits

Dried seafood



Seafood can be preserved by slicing it open and drying it in the air, which causes a tough membrane to form over the surface. Exposure to the sun and mineral-laden sea breezes create a firmer flesh and a condensed savoriness not found in other forms of processing. This practice is truly the embodiment of the wisdom and skill that grew out of the Japanese people's intense fondness for fish.