



Miso Soup and Clear Soup

味噌汁
だし

Japanese soups can be divided into two major categories—**miso** soup and clear soup. Both are made with **dashi**, soup stock. **Miso** is mixed into the **dashi** to make **miso** soup, while clear soups use salt, soy sauce and **sake** to add flavor to the **dashi**. Most people tend to have **miso** soup with everyday meals, especially breakfast. This is closely connected to the fact that in the old days, many people made **miso** at home. **Miso** is made by adding salt and malted rice or malted barley to soybeans that have been steamed and mashed. This mixture is then fermented and allowed to mature. There's also a type of **miso** that is made entirely from soybeans, using malted soybeans instead of malted rice or malted barley. There are many other regional varieties, each with a characteristic flavor.

The all-important **dashi** soup stock can be made from **katsuobushi**, dried bonito flakes, **konbu** seaweed, kelp, or **niboshi**, a type of small dried fish. A combination kelp and bonito stock is made by first soaking a piece of **konbu** in water. You heat the water and then remove the **konbu** just before the water starts to boil. Add a handful of dried bonito shavings and remove from heat. Allow the shavings to sink, and then strain immediately. This gives you a delicious stock. **Konbu** contains glutamic acid, while bonito flakes are full of inosinic acid. The synergy of these two "umami" ingredients results in a fragrant stock full of **umami** flavor. This is by far the tastiest stock in Japan and is used for clear soups. Common ingredients in clear soups are shrimp, fish, **tofu** and seasonal vegetables. A sliver of **yuzu**, **kinome*** or mustard adds zest to the soup and enhances the **umami** flavor. Some of the popular ingredients in **miso** soup include thinly sliced and fried **tofu**, raw **tofu**, **daikon** radish, potatoes and other seasonal vegetables. These ingredients are added to enhance the combined **umami** of **dashi** and **miso**. The key to a good Japanese soup is the care with which the **dashi** is prepared.

***kinome** : Japanese pepper shoots



Clear soup



Ingredients for dashi stock



Miso



Miso soup



Japanese Sake and Shochu

日本酒
焼酎

Sake is a unique Japanese alcoholic beverage, boasting over one thousand years of history. It is brewed primarily from rice. **Sake** production requires sophisticated techniques to induce **koji** mold to convert starch to sugar and ferment the rice malt. **Sake** brewing developed in connection with religious rituals and official ceremonies. Varieties of **Sake** from different areas of Japan have distinct flavors due to local variation in the quality of rice and water. Water makes up 80 percent of **sake** and has the biggest effect on quality. Water from the Nada area of Hyogo Prefecture is said to be the hardest of all Japanese waters. **Sake** made from Nada water is highly valued and was shipped from Osaka to Edo (present day Tokyo) as far back as the 17th century. Since then, **sake** has come to be made with softer waters as well. One unique aspect of Japanese **sake** is that it can be enjoyed both cold and warm. Many Japanese foods such as **sashimi**, soups, **aemono***, stews and fried food developed as foods suitable to accompany **sake**. Japanese **sake** is most often enjoyed in a small ceramic or glass cup, but you can also enjoy it in a wine glass.

Shochu is a type of liquor that's brought to a high level of purity through repeated distillation. While **shochu** like this is used in cocktails, recently there has been a revival of so called "genuine **shochu**," or **shochu** that is distilled only once in order to bring out the unique flavors of its raw ingredients, such as rice, barley, sweet potatoes or buckwheat.

***aemono** : vegetables, seaweed or fish in a dressing



Warm sake



Shochu

Shochu on the rocks (also served with water)



Sake in a wine glass



Cold sake