



Miso Soup and Clear Soup

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

みそ汁
clear soup



Clear soup

Ingredients for dashi stock



Katsuobushi
(dried bonito flakes)



Miso



Miso soup



Japanese Sake and Shochu

日本酒
焼酎
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

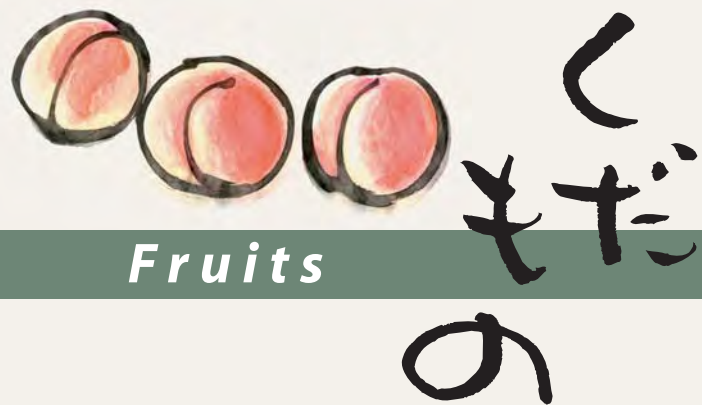
Shochu on the rocks (also served with water)



Sake in a wine glass



Cold sake



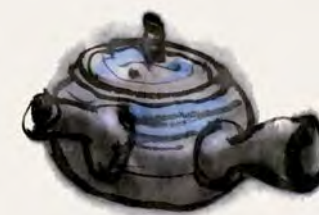
Fruits



A wide variety of fruits are cultivated and enjoyed in Japan. Peaches and persimmons have a particularly long history. They were introduced from China way back in the 3rd century. There are two main types of persimmons: **amagaki**, or sweet persimmons, and **shibugaki**, or astringent persimmons. The astringent ones are inedible until they are dried or soaked in alcohol or hot water. Dried persimmons are very sweet and are often served with tea. Persimmons are rich in both vitamin C and carotene, which is converted to vitamin A in the body. Persimmon leaves contain antiseptic properties and are used for **kaki-no-ha** sushi, which is sushi wrapped in persimmon leaves. They can also be eaten fried, as **tempura**, or made into tea. **Nashi**, or Japanese pears, also have a long history, as do grapes. Grape cultivation began over 800 years ago in the Kamakura period. In addition to a rich variety of table grapes, many grapes are grown to make juice and wine.

The **unshu mikan**, or satsuma mandarin orange, as it's known in the West, is cultivated in regions with a relatively mild climate. Cultivation began in the mid-18th century, first as a luxury gift item.

As production increased, it became a popular winter fruit, rich in vitamin C. The cultivation of apples began in the mid-19th century in northern Japan and other regions with colder climates. Apples are widely eaten. Not only for their sweet taste but also for the benefits they offer the digestive system. These are just some of the many fragrant and delicious fruits that are cultivated in Japan, each with a different historical background. Thanks to continuous fruit development over many years, Japan has some of the highest quality fruits in the world.



Japanese Green Tea & Sweets



Sencha and fresh sweets

Tea was first introduced to Japan from China in the form of compressed or brick tea. By the 12th century the drinking of **matcha**, a powdered tea brewed in hot water, became popular among Buddhist priests and the aristocracy, giving rise to the highly aesthetic and philosophical tea ceremony: the way of tea. The mid-18th century saw the development of **sencha**, a loose tea made by steaming, rolling and drying tea leaves. Ever since then **sencha** has been at the heart of Japanese green tea.

Japanese tea refers to **sencha** and other forms of green tea in which the leaves are heat-treated before drying to prevent oxidation and fermentation. There are various types of green tea, depending on the production process, which part of the tea leaf is used and the production area. Some are best drunk after meals, while others go very well



Dorayaki

with sweets. Green tea is rich in vitamin C and is believed to have other health benefits that include regulating blood cholesterol and preventing hypertension.

The development of **wagashi**, Japanese sweets, went hand in hand with the cultivation of tea in Japan. Just as there are different types of Japanese tea, Japanese sweets can be classified into three categories according to moisture content: fresh sweets, semi-moist sweets and dry sweets. From plain rice crackers to delicately colored sweets with seasonal design motifs, the variety is endless. Many sweets are associated with seasonal events and annual customs. Most traditional Japanese sweets are made from non-animal products (apart from eggs) such as **azuki** beans, sweet Japanese beans and rice flour. Traditional Japanese sweets are thus free of fat and tend to have fewer calories than Western sweets, such as pies or chocolate, which are often rich in butter and cream.



Matcha

Fresh sweets



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