

## Japanese Pickles

Tsukemono: Pickles in Japanese Cuisine

"a bowl of rice with a small plate of pickles and some soup is not merely food, but cuisine..." - Ashkenazi

"Even in the dead of winter, one bite and you are in full summer again" - A Taste of Japan, Donald Richie

"It's enough for me to eat a bowl of rice with pickles and a miso soup." - Ashkenazy

"Mother eats seaweed and plum pickles / and when the Mormons come knocking / she does bird talk." -

"Pearls" by Roripaugh

Rarely is there a meal in Japan where pickles, *tsukemono*, are not served.

**For breakfast...** A "proper" Japanese breakfast would include rice and miso shiru, okazu of fish and pickles. The pickles might include soft umeboshi, and matsutake (pine mushroom) and radish pickle.

**For lunch (on the go)...** Every day millions of Japanese trot off to school or work with a bento, a boxed lunch that almost invariably contains rice balls wrapped in seaweed with plum or pickles inside. Teishoku, a set meal, includes several varieties of tempura, plus rice, pickles, and soup. To form a complete meal, tempura is often served with soup, rice or noodles, and pickles.

**In the market...** In the outdoor market of Shimo-Kitawawa, stall owners shout their wares, and feature stands selling only a large variety of pickles (like Guss's!). Plums, radishes in vinegar, in salt, and in sake, dried and pickled fish, fresh bamboo shoots, several varieties of local miso pickles color the stands.

**Before meals...** Japanese pickles are often served in bars and restaurants as appetizers.

**At everyday meals...** While boiled spinach, eggplant and green beans are all typical side dishes, pickles are the most common (and convenient) vegetables served.

**At feasts...** a collection of sunomono form the final element of the main course. "pickles intended to see the rice through and to refresh the palate. Pickled slices of saba (mackerel), cucumbers, young shoots, and red peppers, were pickled in nanban ("Southern barbarian" [i.e., Spanish or Portuguese]) style, a delicate escabeche. These were served with small containers of freshly cooked rice: the necessary "center" of any meal." The traditional Japanese tea ceremony includes pickles.

**Between meals...** In farmhouses, a plate of pickled vegetables is a common daily snack. "A common snack offered to guests in rural areas is pickles, which more frequently twenty or more years ago than now, were home-made, and reflected specific household tastes. In Yuzawa ... housewives would bring out glorious pickles: gourds stuffed with wild mushrooms, stuffed with chrysanthemum leaves further stuffed with bits of eggplant, the whole pickled in sake lees or bran."

**After meals...** Ending a meal with tsukemoni is a strong tradition in Japanese cooking.

### Tsukemono History

In snow-covered mountain villages, especially, pickles were a sole source of vegetables until warmer weather brought fresh crops. Eaten with tea or rice, they were both delicious and nourishing.

Eighth century records discuss pickling salt vegetables more than 1,500 years ago. The variety of pickles in Japan increased gradually, reaching today's levels during the Edo Period (c.1603-1867).

In 1836, a pickle wholesaler in Edo (present-day Tokyo), published detailed instructions on how to make 64 kinds of pickles. During the Edo period, the tsukemonoya (pickle shop) came into existence. As time passed and the use of pickles got even more sophisticated, and were chosen to add color and texture to different kinds of food, or to clear the palate for a new taste (e.g., pickled ginger).

Pickling with rice bran adds vitamin B1 and has two other advantages: removing of some of the water produces a concentrated, high-fiber food, and the lactic bacteria present aids digestion.

Taste: Tsukemono offer color, texture and aroma to a meal, keeping their basic taste even after lengthy pickling, and maintaining their crispness and flavor even after being in the pickle pot for a year.

Pickles Today: Today, with vegetables available year-round, pickling is no longer essential. Pickles still provide an inexpensive and delicious alternative to ordinary vegetables and the art of pickling has evolved into a sophisticated means of complementing and enhancing the flavors of other foods.

*Pickling traditions continue, passed down from generation to generation. Again, from A Taste of Japan. "after the war many Japanese mothers took to making their own pickles and whole generations grew up associating tsukemono and maternal care. The bond continues even now when the vast majority of pickles are store bought. Tsukemono are... a 'caring' food."*

### **Types of Pickles and Methods**

*"It is said that in Japan there are four thousand different kinds of tsukemono and over one hundred different techniques for making them" - Richie.*

There are endless varieties of tsukemono, including fruit, vegetables, eggs, seeds. Fish and meat are kept in miso or sake. Cherry blossoms are pickled (sakura no hanazuke) and served in hot water to mark special social occasions.

Ingredients vary with the season, but tsukemono are generally vegetables: Chinese cabbage, daikon radish, carrots, bamboo, turnips, burdock root, ginger root, kyuri (Japanese cucumbers), and Japanese eggplant (nasu).

The main pickling agents are salt, rice bran, miso (fermented bean paste), sake lees, malt and mustard. Weight and salt together force water out of the vegetables, promoting a slow process of fermentation. Regional recipes combine different methods with different vegetables: nara-zuke, Nara's famous pickled gourd or daikon in sake wasabi-zuke; shizuoka's wasabi is horseradish pickled in sake; kyoto's senmai-zuke is daikon sliced paper thin, sprinkled with red pepper and preserved in kelp. A lot are available commercially but many people make pickles at home because it's so inexpensive and easy.

### **Shiozuke**

In the simple and popular Shiozuke, or salt pickles, vegetables are salted in a earthenware jar and pressed with a heavy stone for several hours to several days. Today's modern Japanese kitchens use a "pickle press."

One-night salt pickles are called ichiyazuke. A long-term variety are umeboshi, tart, salty pickled plums or apricots, well-known and frequently eaten (often daily!). Umeboshi were first mentioned in 10th century writing. They were originally a disinfectant, then a medicine before becoming a favorite pickle. Popular at breakfast, many think umeboshi are a good appetite stimulant - one must eat a lot of rice to get rid of the salty-sour taste. Umeboshi can be used whole or in a paste.

### **Suzuke**

Suzuke are pickles cured in vinegar. As Japanese rice vinegar has a low acidity, these pickles cannot be kept for long.

### **Nakazuke**

In nukazuke pickling, vegetables are covered with nuka, or rice bran, salt and dried chilies, for about three months. In many households, salt bran is kept in a cask or jar on hand. The most popular kind of nukazuke is takuan zuke, pickled daikon radish. Colored yellow with turmeric, the best season for natazuke is winter when the water freezes on the surface of the keg for keeping natazuke. Nukazuke have a pungent aroma, a tangy flavor, and gather vitamins and minerals from the rice bran. Unlike salt pickles, nukazuke only last for a few days once removed from the pickling medium, so it's best to eat them right after they are washed.

### **Takuan**

Japanese radish preserved in rice bran (crisp, tart, deep yellow in color). The most popular way to prepare daikon radish, legend has it the pickle was named for the resemblance of the heavy stone used in pressing to the gravestone of pickle inventor and vegetarian Zen Priest Takuan. But it is also said that the name came from "takuwae-zuke" = to preserve.

### **Kasuzuke**

For Kasuzuke, a white liquor called sakekasu (made from the rice left from making sake) is combined with sugar and salt to make a pickling medium.

### **Misozuke**

The oldest known variety, misozuke, is made by imbedding vegetables such as garlic, pumpkin, in miso paste. Miso pickles take a long time, sometimes years, to mature. To form the pickling base, miso is mixed with sake. A few ways to make misozuke using this quick parboiling method:

- *Carrots, burdock (gobo), parboil and pat dry inch long spears before embedding in red miso for at least 3 months*
- *asparagus, parboil and pat dry before embedding in white miso overnight*
- *beefsteak leaves (shiso), embed in red or white miso at least 1 month.*
- *daikon, cut into rounds about ¼ inch thick (you can also cut them into half moon shapes). Embed in red miso for at least 3 months*
- *Japanese cucumbers (kyuri), cut into rounds about ½ inch thick, salt press, then embed in red or white miso for at least 4 months*

### **Kojizuke**

Koji, rice mold, is used as the pickling base (koji is also used in the manufacture of sake, soy sauce, miso and mirin). Bettarazuke, one kind of kojizuke, is daikon pickled in koji. This winter pickle is known for its sweet flavor and alcoholic aroma.

### **Shoyuzuke**

Vegetables can be pickled in shoyu, soy sauce, and mirin, a sweet liquid flavoring. Fukujinzuke is one of the most popular kinds of soy sauce pickles, and is the standard accompaniment to curry and rice. To make fukujinzuke, a mixture of seven thinly sliced vegetables (which could include white radish, eggplant, lotus root, ginger, shiso buds, turnip, shiitake, udo, sword beans, shirouri) is salted and pickled in soy sauce and mirin.

### **Senmaizuke**

The famous pickle of Kyoto is made from turnip, salt-pickled for up to a month with konbu (a seaweed), mirin or sugar, and chili peppers.

### **Iburi Gakko**

Around October in Akita, people dried radishes over the daily cooking hearth. The dried and smoked radishes were then pickled with salt and rice bran for two to three months, making "iburi gakko," or "smoked pickles."

## Different types of Japanese tsukemono pickles, and how some may not be worth the hassle to make yourself

posted on 13 May 2008 by maki :: [16 comments](#)



Periodically, someone asks about Japanese pickles - those crunchy, salty, sweet-sour, even spicy bits of goodness that accompany a traditional meal, especially breakfast. There are a big variety of Japanese pickles, and sooner or later you might consider making them.

Some time ago I did a week-long series on making [instant, or overnight pickles](#). These pickles can be made very quickly, usually with ingredients that are easy to get a hold of. If you want to try your hand at Japanese style pickles, I recommend starting there. There are also a couple of cookbooks in English dedicated to quick and easy pickles, both of which are quite good: [Quick and Easy Tsukemono: Japanese Pickling Recipes](#) by Ikuko Hisamatsu, and [Easy Japanese Pickling in Five Minutes to One Day: 101 Full-Color Recipes for Authentic Tsukemono](#) by Seiko Ogawa.

However, the type of pickles that you are likely to be served in a high class traditional inn in Japan, or even the type you can buy in vacuum sealed packs at a supermarket, are a bit more complicated to make, especially outside of Japan. Here are some examples.

### Umeboshi or pickled plum

Umeboshi or pickled plums (the reddish lumps pictured above) are arguably the most famous Japanese pickles. The just-ripened fruit of the *ume* tree, which belongs to the *prunus* family of fruit trees (which includes the various kinds of Western plums, apricots, peaches and cherries), are pickled in a very time consuming and prolonged process. Here are the basic steps involved:

- In the spring, *ume* fruit are carefully washed and de-stemmed, so as not to prick or damage the fruit.
- The fruit are salted in lots of salt, then weighted down and left for about a month or more in a disinfected container. The weight is changed during this process according to how much liquid is extracted from the plums.
- In June when red shiso leaves are out, the leaves are salted and then added to the salted *ume*. The whole thing is disinfected and weighted down again.
- In July to early August, when the sun is hot, the *ume* are taken out and dried out in the sun. (This is the *hoshi* part of *umeboshi*, which means “dried”).
- Sometimes the *umeboshi* are further marinated in a flavoring liquid. An important by-product of *umeboshi* making is the *ume* vinegar, the salty-sour liquid that is extracted from the *ume*.

Besides the time it takes to make *umeboshi* (a surprising number of people in Japan do make it, including my mother - it's sort of like a yearly ritual) you can probably see the difficulties presented in trying to make it outside of Japan. First, where to get a hold of *ume*? (I've often thought about the possibility of using apricots as a substitute, but apricots ripen at the wrong time.) You'd have to get a hold of red shiso leaves too - the only way to do that that I know of is to grow them yourself from seed. And finally, you probably need to live in an area that gets as hot as much of Japan does in the summer for the *umeboshi* to dry out properly.

So, to make *umeboshi*, you'd have to start by planting your own *ume* trees. It's often said that Tokyo and Atlanta have similar climates. Anyone in Georgia want to give it a go? :)

### **Other pickles that use *ume* vinegar**

*Ume* vinegar is a pretty important ingredient in many other pickles. *Shibazuke* (pictured above) for instance, the bright purple pickles you can buy in vacuum packs, is a mixture of cucumber and eggplant (aubergine), pickled in *ume* vinegar with additional red shiso leaves. I did try to make this once, but found that it really needs the small, firm Japanese or Asian eggplants and cucumbers. Red pickled ginger (*benishouga* 紅シヨウガ) is also pickled in *ume* vinegar - and requires young, tender ginger root. *Ume* vinegar is sold at supermarkets in Japan, and is becoming more available outside of Japan these days, so if you can get a hold of the base ingredients you can give them a try.

### **Nukazuke, pickling vegetables in fermented rice bran**

Another major ingredient used for making pickles is rice bran or *nuka* (糠) . This of course is what is polished off rice grains to produce white rice. Rice bran pickles or *nukazuke* (糠漬け) are what you usually get at traditional restaurants, many of whom pride themselves on the quality of their homemade \_\_nukazuke\_\_.

To make rice bran pickles, a special moist rice bran bed called the *nukedoko* is made. This rice bran bed is the key - it's salted, flavored with various things that hold lots of umami, and slightly fermented. Fresh vegetables are buried for a couple of days in this moist, living bed and allowed to lightly ferment themselves. Taking care of a *nukadoko* requires time and skill. It's rather similar to taking care of a sourdough starter, except it's much more high maintenance, even more

so than a [desem starter](#). You can't easily go away on a long vacation if you want to keep a rice bran bed alive and happy. (And you must never, ever let any animal products near your *nukadoko*.)

Unlike umeboshi, most rice bran pickles are not long-keeping; like instant pickles, they must be refrigerated and eaten within a few days.

## **Dried vegetable pickles**

Another category of pickle is the dried vegetable pickle. These pickles are probably very ancient in provenance. Freshly farmed whole vegetables are hung out in the open air to dry out, then they are salted and pickled. One of the most well known ones of this type are *takuan* or *takuwan*, bright yellow, slightly sweet pickles made from half-dried daikon radish (pictured above). (The yellow is not artificial food dye when made using traditional methods; it comes from turmeric, called *ukon* in old Japanese.) *Nozawanazuke* or *takanazuke*, dried greens that are pickled, are also of this type. These kinds of pickles require a lot of time to make, and really only make sense if you have the space to make them in bulk - like if you have a daikon radish farm.

I've thought off and on about making a rice bran bed (you can buy rice bran at Japanese grocery stores). But it won't happen this year, since I have a lot of things to do, will likely be doing a lot of travelling and basically just won't have the time. Maybe another year, when I'll have enough time to grow lots of my own vegetables. In the meantime, I'm going to stick to storebought pickles and made-in-a-few-minutes [instant pickles](#).

## Introduction to quick Japanese tsukemono (pickles)

posted on 19 Mar 2007 by maki :: [5 comments](#)

In Japan, *tsukemono* or pickles are used as *hashi-yasume*, literally “chopstick resters”, side dishes that have a totally different texture and flavor. So for instance if you had some grilled meat with a sweet-savory sauce as the main course, you might have some simple, crunchy pickled cucumber slices to go with it.

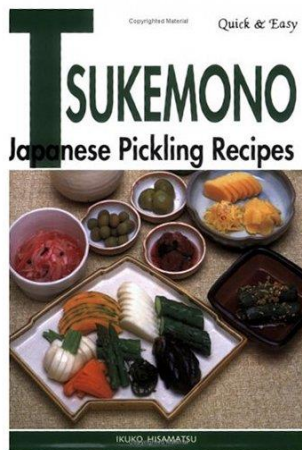
This week I’ll be posting some quick Japanese vegetable pickle recipes. Japanese pickles can be very loosely divided into three kinds: the kind that take some time to ‘ripen’, but then last indefinitely, rather like Western style pickles; the kind that is ready in a few days, but which require a pickling bed that takes time to make and to maintain; and finally, the quick and easy kind that can be made and eaten within a day. The last two kinds do not keep well - just like fresh vegetables, they must be eaten within a short time.

Quick pickles, called *sokusekizuke* (instant pickles) or *ichiya-zuke* (overnight pickles) depending on how long they take to come to full flavor, are very easy to make as their names suggest. They are a great way to prepare vegetables without having to add any additional fat, though a few recipes do call for some oil.

### Key components of quick Japanese pickles

- The vegetables. Choose very fresh vegetables, preferably in season. All kinds of vegetables can be used alone or in combination. The most popular pickling vegetables are Chinese / nappa cabbage, regular cabbage, cucumbers, turnips and daikon radish, but many other vegetables can be used - carrots, celery, various greens, etc.
- Salt. Salt is used to extract the moisture from the vegetables as well as for flavor.
- Umami ingredients. These are added for extra flavor and to bring out the natural flavor of the vegetables. The most common umami ingredient used is kombu seaweed. Other ones include tiny dried shrimp, bonito flakes, and dried shiitake mushrooms. Sometimes instant dashi granules or *ajinomoto* (MSG) are used too.
- Other flavoring ingredients. Varying these can give character and interest to pickles. Some common flavoring ingredients include: shiso leaves, fresh or dried; various citrus zests, flavored oils, citrus juices, vinegar, and aromatic vegetables like ginger and green onions.

### Pickling book



I've only found one book in English totally dedicated to quick Japanese pickles: [Quick & Easy Tsukemono: Japanese Pickling Recipes](#) by Ikuko Hisamatsu. It's pretty good with lots of colorful and helpful photos, and given the price I would recommend it to anyone who likes the flavor and concept of an alternative way to prepare fresh vegetables besides making a salad. It is a translation from a Japanese book though, so you do see some ingredients that are commonplace in Japan but aren't elsewhere. There's no explanation of those ingredients so it could be a bit confusing.

I'm going to try to stick to ingredients that are fairly easy to get outside of Japan, or at least can be easily bought from mailorder sources, for my recipes this week (as always).

### **Care with instant pickles**

I'm repeating myself but just to emphasize: instant pickles are **not** meant to be kept for a long time. They should be eaten within a few days, and stored in the refrigerator.

Most instant pickle recipes are rather salty, so if sodium intake is a concern you may want to decrease the amount and increase other flavoring ingredients, or add a bit of vinegar or citrus juice.



# Pickled Ginger Recipe

User Rating ★★★★★ 4.8 out of 5

By [Setsuko Yoshizuka](#),



Pickled Ginger

Pickled ginger is usually served with sushi. Try to eat pieces of pickled ginger between different kinds of sushi. It helps to clean your mouth and enhance the flavors. It's best to use [fresh young ginger \(shin shoga\)](#) to make pickled ginger.

[Photo Tutorial: How to Make Pickled Ginger](#)

[Japanese Sushi Recipes](#)

[Japanese Recipes](#)

[Japanese Food Pictures](#)

## Ingredients:

- 2 lb fresh young ginger (shin shoga)
- 3 cups rice vinegar
- 2 cups sugar
- 2 tsps salt

## Preparation:

Wash young ginger root and rub off skin. Slice the ginger thinly and salt them. Leave salted ginger slices in a bowl for one hour. Dry the ginger slices with paper towels and put them in a sterilized container/jar. Mix rice vinegar and sugar in a pan and bring to a boil. Pour the hot mixture of vinegar and sugar over the ginger slices. Cool them. Pickled ginger changes its color to light pink. (\*If you are using old ginger, it might not turn pink naturally.)Cover the jar and store it in the refrigerator.



# Namasu Recipe

By [Setsuko Yoshizuka](#), About.com



Namasu is pickled daikon radish and carrot. Since daikon and carrot express celebration colors of red and white, it's one of Japanese New Year's food.

## Ingredients:

- 1 pound daikon radish
- 1/4 pound carrot
- 3/4 cup dashi soup stock
- 1/3 cup vinegar
- 3 Tbsp. sugar
- 1 tbsp sake

## Preparation:

Peel and cut carrot and daikon radish into thin strips. Put a pinch of salt over the carrot and daikon and leave for 20 minutes. Rinse them and squeeze to remove excess water. Put daikon and carrot strips in a large bowl. Put dashi, vinegar, sugar, and sake in a sauce pan and bring to a boil. Pour the vinegar mixture over carrot and daikon strips and mix well. Leave it overnight.

Makes 4 servings

# Cucumber and Wakame Seaweed Salad (Sunomono)

User Rating ★★★★★ 4.5 out of 5  
([4 reviews](#))

By [Setsuko Yoshizuka](#), About.com



Cucumber and Wakame Seaweed Sunomono

It's a Japanese sunomono (vinegary salad) recipe.

## Ingredients:

- 1 small cucumber
- 1 cup wakame seaweed (softened)
- 4 tbsp rice wine vinegar
- 2 tbsp sugar
- 1/2 tsp salt

## Preparation:

Cut softened wakame seaweed into about 2inch-long pieces. Slice cucumber into thin rounds. Put salt over cucumber slices and set aside for 20 minutes. Squeeze cucumber slices to remove the liquid. Mix vinegar and sugar in a bowl. Add wakame seaweed and cucumber slices in the bowl and mix well.

## Posts Tagged 'Japanese Pickles'

### [Pickled Ginger \(Gari\)](#)

March 26, 2009



I've been using this recipe for the last 20 years and it never fails to impress my guests. It's from Jeff Smith's book, *The Fugal Gourmet – Our Immigrant Ancestors*. The only thing I've changed is to substitute the red food-coloring with a sliver of red beet. Be sure to buy fresh young ginger root and wear plastic or rubber gloves when peeling and shaving the root. Otherwise, your hands will be on fire for the rest of the day. Use a potato peeler to shave strips from the root. This is a Japanese condiment used to cleanse the pallet between sushi courses and is served along with wasabi, takuan pickles and the like. Try it with pork roast, roasted chicken, or ham steaks.

1/4 lb. of fresh young ginger root, peeled and shaved paper thin

1/2 cup Rice wine vinegar

2 Tbsp sugar

1/4 tsp salt

1 slice of raw red beet

In a stainless steel sauce pan, place the vinegar, sugar, salt, and beet slice, bring to a boil over medium heat and stir until sugar is dissolved. Add the ginger, reduce heat to low and simmer for 1 minute. Remove beet slice once the ginger is lightly pink in color. Pack sterilized jars with the ginger, pour brine over and seal. When cool, refrigerate up to one month.

Once you have your ginger pickles and daikon pickles made, plan a sushi party and include tempura veggies, hijiki seaweed salad, pear and saki sorbet, and almond cookies.

Tags: [Condiments](#), [Ginger](#), [Japanese Pickles](#), [Pickles](#), [Sushi Pickles](#)

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### [Daikon \(Salad & Pickles\)](#)

March 26, 2009



Daikon radish is fairly common in supermarkets and Farmers Markets these days. And it's not just for Asian cuisine anymore either. It tastes very much like our little red radishes, perhaps more mild. If you haven't tried daikon, it could be an acquired taste, I urge you to buy a small one and experiment. Here's a couple of simple ideas :

Wash and peel daikon like a carrot. Make long threads of daikon on a mandolin or with a zester. Do the same thing with a carrot so you have equal parts daikon and carrot. In a small bowl whisk together 1 Tbsp rice wine vinegar (or any vinegar you have on hand), 1 tsp sesame oil, 1/2 tsp sugar, and 1 tsp soy sauce. Pour over the angel-hair daikon and carrot and toss lightly. This can be added to a master-piece Chef salad or your favorite green salad. It's crunchy enough for a sub-sandwich and of-course it can be added to a sushi box or sashimi plate.

Daikon has amazing health benefits, such as digesting fats and as a diuretic, and you can get those facts on the web, just google daikon health benefits.

This Japanese pickled daikon (called Takuan) is good with fish and meats and very simple to make. It's usually yellow in color from the addition of yellow food coloring, however you can attain the same color with a small slice of fresh turmeric or 1/4 tsp of ground turmeric. Fresh turmeric is available at Asian markets and looks like ginger root. Once pickled, Takuan will keep in the refrigerator for several weeks and makes a great gift for foodie friends...add it to a basket of your homemade pickles.

### **Takuan (Daikon pickles Japanese Style)**

6 medium Daikon radish – peeled, sliced 1/4 inch thick and halved

1/4 cup sea salt or pickling salt

1/4 cup distilled white vinegar

1/4 cup sugar

1 sliver fresh turmeric root (or 1/4 tsp ground turmeric)

1 dried chili pepper – chopped

1 cup water

Pack sterilized canning jars with daikon. Boil all the brine ingredients until sugar is dissolved. Cool. Remove turmeric root. Pour over daikon in jars and cover. Place in refrigerator. Shake jars occasionally. Pickle will be ready in about two days.