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[Kanao's Kitchen](#)

Saba Nitsuke: Simmered Mackerel

Posted in [main dish](#), [Recipe](#) by kanako on July 19, 2010



Nitsuke is a very simple simmering technique that yields a deep, sweet, salty, gingery, [umami](#) main dish in just a few minutes. A mainstay of everyday Japanese home cooking, Saba Nitsuke is definitely one of the three or four most often-cooked Japanese dishes.

It's hard to know what more to say about it, actually. My husband pointed out to me that my mom would make it *constantly* while we were staying at my parents' house in Japan. But Saba nitsuke is so common, banal even, it's almost invisible: I'd never even noticed how often we eat it until he mentioned it.

This simmering technique, by the way, works well not only with mackerel but also with just about any kind of fatty fish, including flatfish, sea bream, sardines and pacific saury, too.

Serve Saba Nitsuke alongside [white rice](#) and [miso soup](#) for the quintessential Japanese home-cooked meal.

Ingredients (for two)



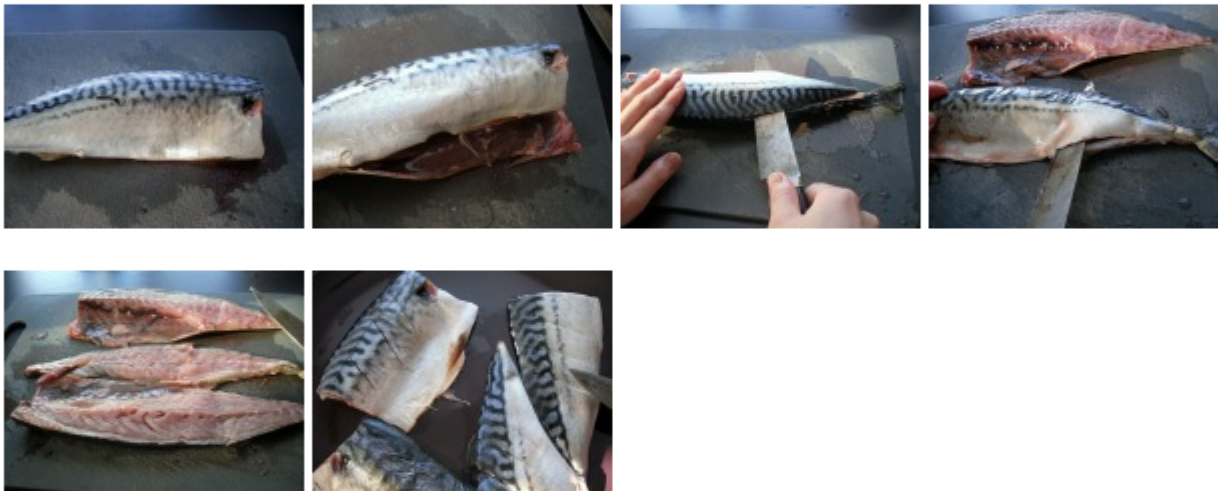
- One whole mackerel (fillets are also fine)
I used frozen whole mackerel but fresh is great, too.
- Sake – 1/3 cup

- Mirin – 1/3 cup
- Water – 1 cup
- Soy sauce – 1/3 cup
- Sugar – 3 tablespoons
- Ginger – one small piece, sliced thin

Preparation

First you fillet the mackerel by cutting it into four parts (two fillets, which you cook, and the head and the spine, which you discard).

1. Cut off the head.
2. Gut the fish. Run the fish under a cold water tap to clean it.
3. Slice it open from the tail to the head along the spine.
4. Slice the other side too.
5. Pat off the excess moisture using kitchen paper and cut a few slits in the skin of the fish.



Cooking

1. Boil the sake and mirin at high heat to get rid of the alcohol. Use a pan big enough so the fish can fit in it without piling up.
2. Add water, sugar, soy sauce and sliced ginger. Bring it to a boil again.
3. As soon as it boils, place the fillets in the pan, scooping the sauce over them now and then while they cook.
4. When it starts boiling again, make a paper towel dome to seal in the moisture and cook over middle heat for about 4 minutes.
5. Take off the paper-towel dome and cook until the sauce reduces (for about 8 minutes), scooping a little of the sauce over the cooking fillets now and then to keep the top shiny and moist. **Don't move the fish around** (it will break apart if you move it) **just ladle the sauce over the fish.**
6. When the sauce becomes thicker and the fish turns beautifully **golden and glazed**, it's ready.
7. Place carefully the fish on a plate and pour the sauce on it, then serve.



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6 Responses

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1.  **Chris** said, on October 7, 2010 at [3:21 pm](#)

This is just what I've been looking for. I have one small problem though. Finding sake, for cooking or drinking, is close to impossible where I am in Canada unless I make a journey to Toronto I suspect. The closest I can find for cooking is chinese rice wine. Would that be an acceptable substitute or blasphamy?


[Reply](#)

-  **kanako** said, on October 11, 2010 at [9:57 pm](#)

Hi Chris,

The taste is a little bit different, but I have also used chinese rice wine when I can't find sake myself. It's really ok in a pinch.


[Reply](#)

2.  **Olga Mokhov** said, on January 2, 2011 at [9:58 pm](#)

what is the purpose of the paper towel? Also on step 5 do I need to take the paper towel off?


Thanks so much

[Reply](#)

-  **Kanako's husband** said, on January 3, 2011 at [10:25 pm](#)

Just to be clear, you take the paper towell dome off first – then you spoon sauce over the fish! I edited the main post to clarify.


[Reply](#)

3.  **Musica Nlalma** said, on September 3, 2011 at [11:43 pm](#)

Hi Kanako 😊

what brand of sake and soy sauce do you recommend? there are so much to choose from and i really want to use the best or what you use. thx 😊

[Reply](#)

4.  **kanako** said, on October 5, 2011 at [7:33 pm](#)

Hi,

the brand of cooking sake is Shirakiku and soy sauce brand is Kikkoman. They are fine and easy to find. I don't use low sodium soy sauce.

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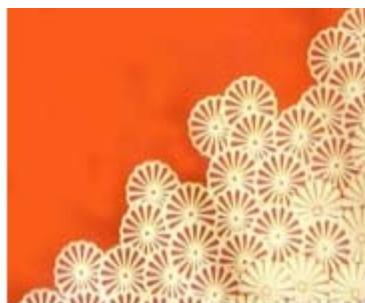
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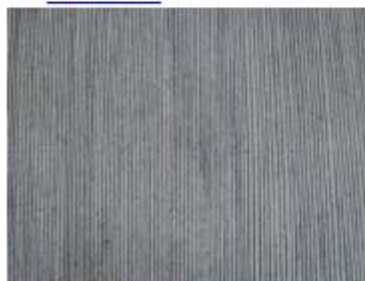
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