

Feeding Yourself in Japan, or, Liberation from the Kombini

Supermarket Tips

- ▶ **Sales** Shop after dinner time or right before the store closes for deep discounts on fresh foods. You'll see stickers that mark down the price—and people lining up behind the clerks putting those stickers on the packages. Japanese supermarkets tend to be pickier about freshness—a lot of the “expired” stuff is still fine for a couple more days. Check the “damaged” produce cart as well. Also, many places put certain foods on sale on a certain day of the week (meats on Monday, bread on Tuesday, fruits on Wednesday, etc.).
- ▶ **Bring a bag** An increasing number of stores in Japan charge for plastic bags. Some stores offer discounts for using eco bags (like that snazzy JET bag you now have on hand).
- ▶ **Get a Point Card** Save up points for later—like when you forgot to bring enough money.
- ▶ **Learn Katakana!** Lots of English has been katakanized, making for easier navigation.
- ▶ **Buy in Season** Seasonal foods taste better, are fresher, and are easier—not to mention cheaper. Seasonal foods also play a role in Japanese culture. You can usually tell when it's in season when it suddenly appears on the stands. If you don't know what to use something for, ask a friend, coworker, or your local yaoya (green grocer) for ideas.

1割(wari) means 10%;
the 引 (biki) means
“off” or discount



Top: 20% off; below: half price



Seasonal Foods (a sampling)

Spring: strawberries, biwa (loquat), kiyoshi (orange-like citrus); bamboo shoots, wild/mountain vegetables, asparagus, new potatoes, na-no-hana (mustard flowers), lettuce; shellfish

Summer: cherries, plums, peaches, melon, pumpkin; edamame, green beans, cucumber, tomatoes, sweet corn, eggplant, zucchini, celery; eel, aji (horse mackerel); noodles

Autumn: (the season for hearty appetites) persimmons, kinkan (kumquat), chestnuts, pumpkin, grapes, pears, apples; sweet potatoes, potatoes, sato-imo (taro root), hakusai, cabbage, carrots; rice, mushrooms (especially matsutake), ginger, ginnan (gingko nuts), soba noodles; cod, yellowtail, sanma (saury), salmon

Winter: yuzu citrus, mikan; broccoli, cauliflower, komatsuna, renkon (lotus root), spinach, daikon radish, turnips, negi (leek); crab, oysters, fugu, tuna

Extra Vocab

The JET Diary has a fantastic list of food and grocery store-related words. Here are a few more to add to that list:

- 消費期限 (shōhi kigen) - expiry date
- 午前 (gozen) - a.m.
- 午後 (gogo) - p.m.
- グルテン (guruten) - gluten
- 麩質 (fushitsu) - gluten
- 小麦粉 (komugiko) - wheat
- ピーナッツ (piinattsu) - peanuts
- 落花生 (rakkasei) - peanuts
- ナッツ (nattsu) - nuts
- 大豆 (daizu) - soy beans

Food-Related Phrases

Sumimasen! - Excuse me! (required to flag down a waiter to take your order, get your bill, etc.)

Eigo no menyū ga arimasu ka? - Do you have an English menu?

Issho haraimasu - We'll pay together.

Ten-nai de tabemasu - We're eating here.

Itadakimasu - I will receive [this food]; said at the start of the meal (at restaurant or homes)

Gochisō-sama deshita - Thank you for the meal (at restaurants and homes where others prepared the food for you)

At the grocery store:

Sakana wo kakō shite kudasai - Please clean the fish for me (unless you really want to scales and guts in your kitchen.)

San-mai oroshi - 2 fillets plus the rest of the cleaned fish **Sashimi-yō** for use as sashimi

Naizō wo totte kudasai - Please remove the organs.

※Just because it's raw doesn't mean you can eat it as-is. If you want sashimi (raw fish), look for stickers that say 刺身用 (sashimi-yō) or 生食用 (namashoku-yō).

Fish

鮭 (さけ) (sake) - salmon

いくら (ikura) - salmon roe

まぐろ (maguro) - tuna

とろ (toro) - fatty tuna

ふぐ (fugu) - pufferfish

あわび (awabi) - abalone

ほたて (hotate) - mussel

うに (uni) - sea urchin



Left: The kanji for kinugoshi (for kinugoshi-dōfu, i.e. soft tofu).
Right: The kanji for yakisoba. Also written 焼きそば or やきそば.

To download more information please visit the AJET website <http://ajet.net>

AJET Peer Support Group - 8pm to 7am every day – 050-5534-5566
An anonymous listening and referral service, by JETs for JETs



Quick and Easy Recipes: A few ideas to get you started in the world of Japanese meals

Hiya-yakko (Chilled Soft Tofu)

- ▶ Take a chunk of chilled soft tofu (kinugoshi-dōfu) and set on a dish. Add toppings of your choice: bannō negi, naga-negi, myōga, grated ginger, katsuo flakes, sesame, seaweed, etc.
- ▶ Pour desired amt. of tsuyu or (though much saltier) soy sauce. Eat up! In cold weather, try boiling the tofu.

Goma-Ae (Sesame dressing) - Use on veggies of all sorts. Microwave, steam, or boil the veggie, add the dressing, and you're done!

- ▶ Mix ground white sesame seed and sugar or mirin in 1:3 or 1:4 ratio (e.g. 1 tsp sesame to 3 tsp sugar/mirin). Add soy sauce and cooking sake (opt.) to taste to form a somewhat-thick dressing. Use with cooked spinach, bean sprouts, komatsuna, carrots, burdock root (gobo), etc.

Kabocha no Nimono (Simmered Pumpkin)

- ▶ Remove pulp and seeds and cut into bite-size chunks; leave skin on (use enough kabocha to cover bottom of pot).
- ▶ Put in kabocha skin side down. Mix soy sauce, mirin and water in 1:1:1 ratio (e.g. 3 Tbs to 3 Tbs to 3 Tbs), then add to kabocha. Kabocha should be 2/3 submerged. Bring to boil over high heat, then simmer on low heat.
- ▶ Use a "drop lid" (otoshi-buta) or tin foil folded to fit close against the pumpkin. Simmer 10-15 minutes, or til tender. ※Add liquid as needed; use dashi, tsuyu, and/or sugar for variation. Can also use microwave.

Yakisoba

- ▶ Epitome of quick and easy
- ▶ Cut 50-100g pork (bara-niku cut) (opt.), 1/4 head cabbage, 1 carrot, and 1 onion into bite-size slices. Cook pork in 1 Tbsp oil over hi heat til white; add onion, then carrot, then cabbage, then 1 pkg. bean sprouts and sauté til tender. Remove from heat.
- ▶ In same pan, fry one package yakisoba noodles (sold in refrigerated section of supermarket) over high heat ca. 1 min, then add veggies. Add pepper and sauce (labeled simply ソース) to taste. Stir and serve. Endless variations: other veggies, sauces, ketchup, ginger, garlic, etc.

Niku Jaga (Meat and Potatoes)

- ▶ excellent in cooler weather
- ▶ Cut 4 potatoes (skin okay), 1 onion, and 1-2 carrots into chunks. Peel and finely chop 2-3cm chunk ginger, and fry in sesame oil on med.-high heat with onions til onions are translucent. Add ca. 250g sliced meat (pork, but beef and chicken ok) til golden brown. Add rest of veggies.
- ▶ Add carrots, 3 Tbsp soy sauce, and 2 Tbsp each sugar mirin. Add water til half-submerged. Cover, simmer ca 10 min or til most liquid gone. Add more liquid and cook longer if potatoes not yet tender. Thousands of variations--use dashi, tsuyu, sake, more soy sauce, or other seasonings. Try other veggies, too.

Cooking Vocab

- 小さじ (kosaji) - teaspoon (5mL)
- 大さじ (ōsaji) - tablespoon (15mL)
- 強火 (tsuyo-bi) - high heat
- 中火 (chū-bi) - med. heat
- 弱火 (yowa-bi) - low heat
- 加える (kuwaeru) - to add
- 焼く (yaku) - bake, grill
- ゆでる (yuderu) - to boil
- 切る (kiru) - to cut, slice
- 揚げる (ageru) - to (deep) fry
- 炒める (itameru) - to (stir) fry
- 熱する (nessuru) - to heat up
- 温める (atatameru) - to heat, warm
- 注ぐ (sosogu) - to pour
- 入れる (ireru) - to put in, add
- 混ぜる (mazeru) - to stir, mix

Rice Cooker (Suihanki)

- 炊飯 (suihan) - cooking rice
- 白米 (hakumai) - white rice
- 玄米 (genmai) - brown rice
- 無洗米 (musenmai) - unwashed rice
- 早炊 (hayataki) - quick cook
- 予約 (yoyaku) - delay timer
- 保温 (ho-on) - keep warm
- 取消 (torikeshi) - turn off
- おかゆ (okayu) - rice porridge

How to Prepare Rice - The Proper Way

- ▶ Put rice in a bowl with plenty of water and stir and rub the grains of rice together vigorously; the water will turn milky white. Drain.*
- ▶ Repeat at least three times until water is clear. This can also be done with a sieve/colander.
- ▶ Add water to the line corresponding with the number of cups of rice you put in (※1 Japanese cup is 200mL). If making genmai/brown rice, it will require more water.
- ▶ Let sit ca. 20 min. before cooking; this allows more water to be absorbed, meaning the rice is more plump. After cooking, stir gently with a wet rice paddle (shamoji) to allow the steam escape. NB: Got leftover, crunchy rice? It's great for stir-fried rice, soup, or rice pudding.
- *Use this water to simmer daikon (makes it smell and taste better), water plants, etc. Rinsing at least once is strongly recommended; unwashed rice makes the cooker scuzzy and gross.
- ※Always store rice in a dry, airtight container—even a little bit of moisture will spoil it!

Microwave (Denshi Renji)

- 時 (ji) - hour
- 分 (fun/pun) - minute
- 秒 (byō) - second
- 牛乳 (gyūnyū) - milk
- 解凍 (kaitō) - defrost
- 半解凍 (hankaitō) - half defrost
- 蒸す (musu) - steam (also, スチーム)
- 自動メニュー (jidō menyū) - auto menu
- 発酵 (hakkō) - ferment, raise (bread, etc.)

Useful Websites

- i.e. Things We Couldn't Cram in the Margins
- www.omf.org/content/download/10395/49538/file/Cooking ▶ A downloadable list of tons of food vocab.
- nihonhacks.com/japanese-food/how-to-find-300-yen-steaks-in-japan ▶ The URL says it all.
- www.veg.tokyoguide.com ▶ Good list of what *not* to eat if you're a vegetarian.
- www.bento.com ▶ Tons and tons of recipes (in English!)
- justbento.com ▶ Just bentos, just recipes, just a thousand ways to make yourself some excellent food.
- justhungry.com ▶ Yet more recipes to feed yourself.
- themeatguy.jp ▶ Awesome site to supply you with turkey, mutton, kangaroo, alligator, and/or Texas wild boar.
- www.indojin.com ▶ Extensive site to supply you with Indian foods.
- www.theflyingpig.com ▶ For that taste of home. Ships wholesale, packages of common North American foods
- www.fbcusa.com ▶ Need your Tim Tam? Anti-persperant? Vitamins? The Foreign Buyers Club has it.
- www.alishan.jp/en ▶ Order organic foods and natural cleaning supplies.