



“...An important
work that shows the
universality of an
authentic food culture.”

—ALICE WATERS

japanese farm food

Nancy Singleton Hachisu

Foreword by Patricia Wells

Nancy's country. California-born Nancy Singleton Hachisu has been a "stubbornly independent foreign bride" in Japan's northern Saitama Prefecture for over two decades. "I came to Japan for the food, but stayed for love." And she married organic egg farmer Tadaaki Hachisu because he loves food as much as she does. This book is the collected experience of twenty-three years of living on the land as wife, cook, mother, and sometime farmer.

Her advice to trust your instincts is very real. "Cooking farm-to-table food from another country is easy if you . . . take care to understand the heart of the food." She teaches how to touch and listen to the vegetables and source ingredients thoughtfully. "Japanese farm food is bold, clear, and direct—both logical and simple to prepare. A small number of Japanese pantry staples and preparation techniques, and a trip to a farmers' market and fish monger, are all you need to start cooking Japanese farm food." Over 160 recipes range from simple boil-and-serve dishes such as edamame with salt, to country soup simmered in an iron cauldron, to pounded sticky rice sweets enveloped in homemade red bean paste.

Japanese Farm Food invites you into the Hachisu ancestral farmhouse and their community of friends through Nancy's personal stories and experiences; Kenji Miura's evocative photography; and most importantly the way they cook. Nancy plants rice in muddy paddies, makes her own tofu, plucks and dresses chickens and ducks, and makes udon noodles from homegrown wheat flour. As Patricia Wells observes in her foreword, "She's intrepid. Outrageously creative. Intensely passionate. Committed. True and real. I urge you to cook from this book with abandon."



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pickles and soups





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When vegetables are in season, we eat them madly and at every meal. But often we have more than we can possibly eat (or give away), so we make pickles, a time-honored tradition on farms all over the world. Farm vegetables are pickled not only for storage, but also for variation in flavor. We use salt, soy sauce, miso, vinegar, rice bran, or sake lees—alone or in combination—to preserve and enhance the vegetables. Pickles meant to be eaten quickly are treated raw, while pickles destined for long-term storage must first be salted and dried for several days (or longer). I could write a whole book dedicated to Japanese pickles, but in the meantime, I have chosen a sampling of fairly easy to execute but deliciously representative farmhouse pickles. The long-term pickles require patience more than hands-on preparation time, and the quick pickles are more like salted vegetables. All pickles are wonderful served alongside a bowl of rice. Accompanied by a bowl of miso soup, that’s the quintessential Japanese meal and follows the *ichiju issai* formula—one soup, one dish—the basic Buddhist repast, which dates way back in time.

Japanese love a bowl of soup at each meal, be it miso soup with tiny clams, clear fish broth with delicate slivers of green onion floating on the surface (a personal favorite), or a *nabe* (one-pot dish) cooked over a tabletop burner on a cool evening. In fact, one of the first meals I shared with my husband was a *nabe* he prepared in the woods, with a bunch of us squatting under the trees, plunking vegetables into an earthenware pot. The girls had brought *onigiri* (rice balls) so perfectly shaped I was sure they had been fashioned in a mold. Those rice balls lacked soul, but the *nabe* did not. Tadaaki had brought the pot and vegetables from his farm. The water we fetched from a nearby stream. The drink we had bought at a roadside stand driving up the mountain, a cloudy-white unfiltered sake called *nigorizake*. The contrast between the restrained rice balls and the wild *nabe* was remarkable. And that was the day Tadaaki told me he had always thought that he was a throwback to Jomon man (from prehistoric Japan) and that he was more hunter than farmer. I think that was the day I really fell in love with him.

UMEBOSHI

One thing is patently clear—we can never do everything. We can never be that perfect mother, farmwife, or person. As such, I gladly let Baachan make the Japanese pickles. I had my hands full doing the Western ones. And as Baachan got older, Tadaaki often pitched in or made his own style of farm pickles (some successful, some not). It was a relief to be a team: Baachan, me, and Tadaaki. Each of us did what we could, and each of us took up the slack when the others could not.

But writing this book, I knew it was time for me to start assuming more of the traditional Japanese wife's (*oyome*) tasks, such as pickle making for the family, especially since pickles are one of my favorite foods. The *oyome* is the bride in her husband's household regardless of age, and her duties are set in stone. Being a bad American *oyome*, I took another path—one I knew I could follow one day at a time—thus making it possible to live out my whole life in this sometimes restrictive culture.

Furiously testing recipes and writing at every available opportunity made for an extremely busy summer recently. I had also been away in the States for a couple of weeks in early June, and a week after I got back we did rice planting. Rice planting (*taue*) is an all-day affair that involves me cooking lunch and dinner for about thirty-five helpers (plus lunch for the twenty-odd kids and staff at Sunny-Side Up! that day).

A few days before the rice planting, Tadaaki's youngest aunt, Katchan, drove into our courtyard and hauled out a couple of buckets of *ume* she had just picked. Her seventy-something freckled face was beaded with sweat, and she could barely catch her breath. But she was so

proud of picking the last of the *ume* off the family tree—her family tree, since she had grown up in our house. My gratitude was intermixed with a sense of dismay. Yikes! Two more buckets of *ume* (hard sour “plums,” actually of the apricot family) that needed to be dealt with.

I had already salted my local *ume* for *umeboshi* pickles and wasn't planning on making more. Also I was deep into the housecleaning and menu planning for rice planting, all the while trying to write my book. I wanted to cry, but instead smiled and thanked her. I knew she had put enormous effort into picking the *ume* from the low-hanging branches and had searched through the grasses under the tree to gather the fallen fruit. I could be nothing but thankful—truly. Katchan ran cold water in the buckets to soak the fruit and said something about Tadaaki dealing with them, so I turned back toward the house and my kitchen to continue with dinner preparations.

I found the *ume* a couple of days later, still soaking (one day is all you need; two days in the summer heat was pushing it). There were some frothy bubbles forming on the surface of the water: not a good sign. I dumped out the water and freshened up the *ume* with clear cold water before laying them out to dry on flat farm baskets I had perched on the hood of my car. Later that evening, after the sun went down, I passed the baskets through the sliding glass door onto the veranda-cum-hallway that faces the garden (still hoping that Tadaaki would deal with them).

The following day was rice planting, and the *ume* sat in their baskets in the hallway until 9 p.m. the following night. Most of the rice planting helpers had trickled off to their respective

homes, while a few die-hard friends and overnight guests were still winding down the hard day of labor in the rice fields, sharing a last beer or glass of wine. I had finally finished putting the food away and washing the dishes, and I too wanted to sit and share a glass of wine and some relaxed conversation, but the *ume* still sat there, waiting, and they would not wait another day. I knew I could not turn my back on Katchan's effort. And after all they were our *ume*, from a family tree that has been loyally producing *ume* for generations of Hachisu.

Gathering up some last vestige of energy, I hefted the *ume* onto our breakfast room table, found a several-gallon pickling bucket outside the kitchen, and set about washing it (cursing a little). The *ume* and Katchan pushing me, I picked through the fruit, discarding bad ones but keeping ones that were slightly discolored or even slightly smashed (at Tadaaki's advice). “They're fine,” he tossed off casually. Engrossed in conversation, he did not offer to help.

I lined the pickling bucket with a thick plastic bag specifically made for pickling operations and gently slid in the *ume*, to which I added sea salt at 8 percent of the *ume* weight. After squeezing out the air and cinching up the bag, I laid the drop lid on the *ume* and placed a pottery bowl (of the same weight as the *ume*) directly on top. The *ume* stayed like that for a few weeks, happily sitting on my kitchen floor. I kept thinking I should check them, but it was a busy, busy summer. After a few rainy days, the sun appeared, and as luck would have it, I caught the *ume* just before they went bad.

I learned a few things: Don't worry about how pretty the container is, make sure you use a



plastic pickling bag to keep the air out, and check your *ume* to see if the salt is melting and the brine is well distributed around the fruit—occasionally massage a little to distribute. And don't wait too long before you dry the *ume*.

The ones I had put in crockery containers did not fare as well as the Hachisu *ume* Katchan had picked and I had packed in the ugly (but practical) plastic pickling bucket. I dried the *ume* for three days in bright sunlight, returning them to their naturally exuded pickling brine (*umesu*) at night. And now my *umeboshi* (dried *ume*) sit in the kitchen closet, stored in a celadon Korean pickling pot bought at the local flea market. This time I was the good farmwife.



My friend Sharon Jones still talks about when Tadaaki whipped up a simple little Japanese breakfast for her while I slept in. He made her a quick bowl of miso soup, and while the *katsuobushi-konbu* dashi was steeping, he sliced up some turnips he had grown, threw in the leaves as well, and tossed them with sea salt and aromatics. A bowl of rice with a raw egg rounded out the meal, and Sharon was hooked. Mother of a budding farmer and a chef, Sharon is also on the board of directors of Chez Panisse and tends goats in her spare time. But something about the food and the feeling of Japan captured her heart during the three months she spent in this country, and that feeling pulls her back here. This dish epitomizes everything I love about Japanese farm food: simple, pristine flavors of the field and quick to prepare.

turnips and turnip leaves pickled in salt

SERVES 6

KABU NO SHIOZUKE

8 tender turnips with leaves
(about 1½ pounds/675 g)

Scant 2 tablespoons sea salt (27 g)

2 yuzu or 1 Meyer lemon

2 small fresh or dried red chile
peppers

1 teaspoon slivered ginger (optional)

Slice the tops off the turnips and reserve. Pare away any discoloration on the turnips and cut them in half vertically, then crosswise into thin (⅛-inch/3-mm) half rounds. Pick through the leaves and slice a couple of small handfuls into 2 by 1¼-inch (5 by 3-cm) pieces. Toss the turnips and leaves together in a medium-sized bowl and sprinkle with salt. Gently but firmly massage the salt in to distribute well to encourage the turnips to exude a bit of their water.

With a very sharp knife or vegetable peeler, shave off the outer yellow zest of the yuzu or lemon, taking care to avoid the bitter white pith. Stack small slices of zest and slice into very thin strips. Slice the chiles into thin rounds. Slide the zest, chiles, and ginger slivers, if using, into the bowl with the turnips. Massage one more time and serve immediately or pack in a resealable plastic bag and chill for a couple of hours. These keep for a few days refrigerated; however, they will continue to leach out water so they will not retain their pleasing crispness.

RATIO: turnips:salt—10:4

VARIATIONS: Slice carrots into thin rounds or daikon into thin quarters (or halves, depending on the size of the daikon) in place of turnips; adjust the salt to taste. Be sure to slice carrots fairly thin, since they will not soften with salt as much as juicier roots such as turnips or daikon. Include the leaves if at all possible, because they not only add color to the dish but also give the sweet vegetables an added earthy, piquant pizzazz.

PICKLES AND SOUPS





DRIED EGGPLANT

A couple of years ago, I stepped outside and found my mother-in-law (Baachan) laying out thick rounds of eggplant on bamboo screens lined with rush mats. I had never seen her do this, so was intrigued. She was wearing a jaunty straw bonnet banded with a piece of blue-and-white-checked gingham she had tied under her chin. She looked so happy to be out in the sunshine, doing something she used to do because she wanted to, not because she had to. And I know she felt a deep sense of pleasure in being useful—it had become harder and harder for her to get around with her bent back. Also her eyes are not really sharp enough to catch fine cracks in the eggs, so she is not able to help Tadaaki wipe and sort eggs anymore.

I stayed awhile to chat with Baachan and find out how she planned on using the dried eggplant. She told me that they dried the eggplant for use in winter simmered dishes, and I understood immediately the dark flavor the eggplant would impart during those cold, barren winter days. It would be similar to dried shiitake, with

its deeply intense mushroom essence that in some way can replace meat or fish in a simmered vegetable dish. The eggplant is dried during the height of summer, when the sun is at its hottest and the glossy purple orbs are at their peak. The eggplant is cut into 1-inch (2.5-cm) thick rounds and laid out on bamboo racks for several days or until completely desiccated and hard to the touch. The balsa wood–like light pieces are then stored in a cool, dark place. During the winter, dried eggplant or shiitake that have been soaked for about 20 minutes give a simmered dish an intense flavor boost because their natural essence has been concentrated in the drying process.

I was surprised that I had not seen Baachan drying eggplant before, but comforted that even after more than twenty years in Japan, I was still learning traditional ways. And I was enveloped by an incredible warmth from being part of this farming family that still carries out these thrifty country customs. No matter how tired I get, I love being part of that history and hope that I too will keep at it well into my eighties, just as Baachan has.



This is the kind of uninhibited style of cooking Tadaaki loves. It is very manly and visceral as you get right in there with the smashing and breaking. We eat baskets and baskets of cucumbers during the summer and somehow never seem to tire of their crispness. Our teenage sons love this approach to pickling because it is one we only started using a couple years ago and the novelty has not faded.

smashed cucumber pickles with garlic

SERVES 6

TATAKI KYURI

- 1¾ pounds (800 g) Japanese cucumbers (5 or 6 medium)
- 2 cloves garlic, roughly chopped
- 2 teaspoons fine sea salt

Lay the cucumbers on a large cutting board and bang them gently but firmly with a Japanese pestle (*surikogi*) or rolling pin to crack (and slightly smash) the surface of the cucumbers. Break into rough chunks with your hands and drop into a freezer-style gallon-sized resealable plastic bag. Mash the garlic with a pinch of the salt in a mortar with a pestle. Sprinkle the remaining salt over the cucumbers, scrape in the mashed garlic purée, and massage in lightly to distribute the salt and garlic. Roll up the bag and squeeze out the air, then refrigerate for about 10 minutes.

Remove from the fridge when ready to eat, and drain the cucumbers in a wire mesh strainer set over a bowl. Serve before dinner with drinks or as a side dish with any broiled fish, teriyaki-style meats, or steak.

VARIATIONS: Stack 8 shiso leaves, roll into a cigar shape, and slice into fine tendrils; toss gently but well with the cucumbers before serving. Finely slivered ginger (about ½ tablespoon) also adds a bright note—massage in with the garlic. Substitute Western cucumbers, but peel and seed first.



Often served at New Year, *namasu* is a bright and crunchy dish that acts as a refreshing digestive during the holidays when there are guests and we tend to overeat. The sugar-to-vinegar ratio is one of taste, but I prefer these a bit astringent, with not too much sugar, since daikon and carrots are especially sweet in the winter. *Namasu* keeps for about a week and is a pretty splash of color on the table with almost any meal. The carrots are a dominant color that can overwhelm the dish, so keep the balance of daikon to carrot at roughly 2:1 (or 70 percent daikon and 30 percent carrots). This dish is best made in winter from freshly picked daikon and carrots at their peak of flavor.

sweet-vinegared daikon and carrots

SERVES 4 TO 6

NAMASU

1 cup (250 cc) organic rice vinegar

3 tablespoons organic granulated sugar

3 cups (700 cc) julienned daikon
(1¾-inch/4-cm thin matchsticks)

1¼ cups (300 cc) julienned carrots
(1¾-inch/4-cm thin matchsticks)

1½ teaspoons sea salt

Zest from 2 small yuzu or 1 large
Meyer lemon, cut into fine slivers

Heat the vinegar and sugar together in a small saucepan over low heat to melt the sugar. Cool to room temperature before using.

Keep the daikon and carrots in two separate bowls. Sprinkle the daikon with 1 teaspoon salt and the carrots with the remaining ½ teaspoon salt. Massage the salt in gently and let sit for 10 minutes before squeezing out the excess water and dropping into a clean medium-sized mixing bowl. Toss the daikon and carrots with the slivered yuzu peel and cooled sweet vinegar. Chill for 1 day before serving cold.

PLUCKING DUCK FEATHERS

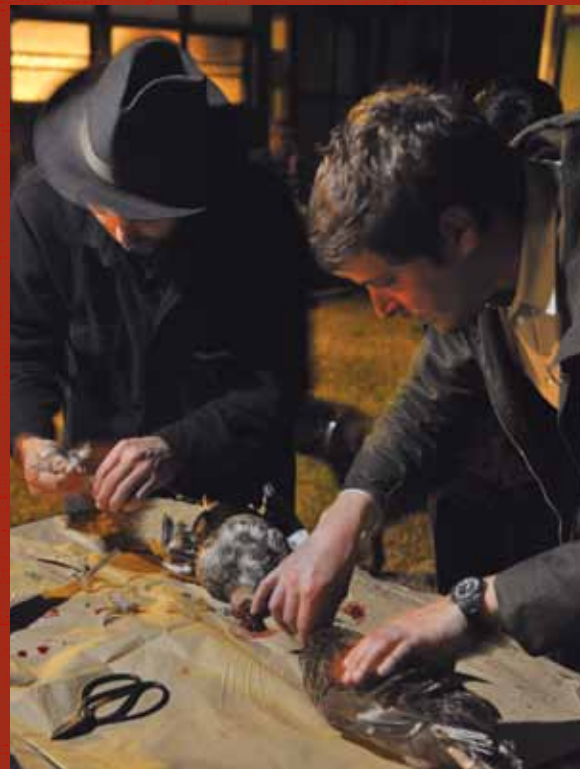
Two and a half hours into the duck plucking, with all the feathers that hadn't already settled on some surface wafting gently in the kitchen, I began to regret forgoing the water dip. At least the ducks didn't smell.

My sons Andrew and Matthew couldn't be convinced to help, but Christopher (my eldest) wandered by and took pity on me. I passed him the duck I had given up on and he went to fetch pliers to remove the wing and tail feathers. Tadaaki breezed in, rolled his eyes at the mess I was making, grabbed a duck, and left. Christopher (more practical than I) followed him out not too long after. But before that, we got to talking about the yearly duck plucking. A bit like childbirth, it's an ordeal I always conveniently forget until Christmas overtakes us one more time and I'm back tugging at those impossibly recalcitrant feathers that don't seem to want to separate from their host. Someone told me recently that we should be plucking the ducks immediately upon killing. After all these years, why didn't I know that?

And why are the Muscovy ducks harder to pluck than the little wild mallard ducks? And why are the glossy green ones a bit easier than the plain white and black ones? And who cares anyway? But these are the things that went through my mind as I plucked the Christmas ducks with early Joan Baez cranked up high.

When we were having babies, we used to buy the ducks from a duck farm. The duck guy would kill to order (either Muscovy or mallard ducks, our choice), and then send them beautifully packed and separated by cut, down to individually wrapped livers, hearts, and gésiers. I often made confit in those days, so he also included extra duck fat, ready to render. I don't know how

much the ducks cost, but those were glorious days. I reminisced with Christopher about those featherless Christmases, and he wondered if we wouldn't go back to ordering ducks from the duck man. The idea is seductively enticing, but I don't think we will. It's not about the money but about not giving up on how we choose to live our life and sticking to a code of ethics when it comes to creating our food. It's a lot easier to buy our rice or flour . . . or even vegetables for that matter. And it's a hell of a lot easier to buy our Christmas ducks, plucked and cleaned. But then we would lose that feeling—that feeling that tunnels into your core and spreads throughout your body when you take a bite of food that you have created from seed or have lovingly raised, respectfully killed, and then painstakingly cleaned. And that's a feeling for which there is no duplicate, and that feeling is addicting because it reaches in and grabs your soul.



I love wakame—slippery and tasting of the sea. And we are lucky to be able to occasionally find good fresh wakame at our local fish market. But there is also a funny (fairly pushy) old lady who sometimes comes by our neighborhood hawking hand-salted wakame. Even when I tell her we still have some, she insists I buy more. I'm not sure from what small seaside town she hails, but she has a thick country twang that is hard to understand. I suppose I should just buy her wakame when the opportunity arises, since she does not come that often and wakame keeps indefinitely in the fridge. Although I never came across it, I've read that salted wakame is available in some Japanese grocery stores in the U.S., and that a few fish markets are selling the fresh—in any case, the dried variety substitutes quite nicely.

miso soup with potato slivers and wakame

SERVES 6

JAGAIMO TO WAKAME NO MISO SHIRU

1 small handful of wakame,
dried or fresh

1 medium potato (4½ ounces/125 g)

Scant 1⅓ cups/300 cc Dashi
(page 307)

2½ tablespoons organic
brown rice miso

Rinse the fresh wakame, drain, and cut into bite-sized pieces (about 1½ inches/4 cm long); or rinse the salt from the salted wakame, soak for 10 minutes in a medium-sized bowl covered with cold water, drain, and chop into bite-sized pieces. Alternatively, soak the dried wakame in a medium-sized bowl for 20 minutes in cold water and chop if needed.

Peel the potato and slice into thin matchsticks. Pour the dashi into a medium-sized saucepan and drop in the potato slivers. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, reduce to a gentle simmer, and cook about 5 minutes or so, until the potato is soft but not falling apart. Add the softened wakame pieces.

Measure the miso into a small bowl and dip a whisk into the miso to catch up all 3 tablespoons. Dunk the miso-covered whisk into the dashi and swirl it around in the soup liquid until the miso is well incorporated. Ladle the soup into small bowls (lacquer if you have them). Serve immediately, either before a meal or at the end with a bowl of rice.

VARIATION: Drop in a few small squares of tofu cut into a ⅓-inch (8-mm) dice from a quarter of a 10.5 oz (300 g) block of Japanese-style “cotton” tofu after adding the miso. Heat gently (and briefly) to warm the tofu squares.

SHISHIMAI

Our friend Harigaya-san lives up in the mountains near here with a group of young (and not so young) men and women who farm, hunt, and make musical instruments together. Harigaya-san is an ex-IT guy who chucked a life making money in Tokyo in favor of a life making computer music and furniture at the top of a winding road deep in the forest. He rebuilt an old Japanese mountain home, leaving the original open hearth (*irori*) cooking area and traditional wood-fired kitchen. That is where the whole crew now lives.

Harigaya-san and his eclectic bunch also play music and practice a type of “lion dance” (*shishimai*) together. They often come to our farm events or parties and perform their wild version of *shishimai*. Donning blue-and-white cotton *yukata* or a long green costume with white arabesque swirls and *shishimai* masks, they dance to invoke the gods and increase rice fertility on rice planting day. As Harigaya-san’s flute music lilts over the rice fields, the workers feel a freshening wind and increase their pace, gaining energy from the quick

bursts of air Harigaya-san sends into his slender piece of bamboo.

I love that Harigaya-san’s mountain group comes to our summer parties and dances their *shishimai* dance to express appreciation for the food. This primordial dance is far removed from the formalized version my kids learned and performed at the local shrine. This dance comes from the heart of the mountains and from the hearts of the dancers.

They set up their “stage” in the back portion of the yard under the chestnut tree, and we gather around as the drummers begin beating a deep, reverberating cadence. Harigaya-san joins in with sweet, haunting flute notes. The *shishimai* dancers duck behind trees and coyly feint, a grappling sort of “fight,” sometimes lunging into the crowd, the masks biting at the heads of the watchers. The more intrepid kids hold their ground, while some hide behind their mothers. We don’t censor here—Japanese love the phantasmagoric spirits that abound in old stories

and customs. With some reassuring words, the kids accept that they know the guy under the outlandish wooden mask and billowing green cloth garb. “It’s just Adam,” I say, for one of the dancers is an ex-teacher who is now practicing traditional Japanese carpentry and lives in the nearby foothills with his wife and baby.

As the dance ends and the musicians and dancers make their way back to the patio, guests once again, they leave the drums and cymbals for the kids to try. Four-year-old Minami jumps behind the biggest drum and throws herself into beating with joyous abandon. Kyo and Eric join on the smaller drums. Knowing the kids, my instinct is to worry about the drums, but I love the trust the musicians have and let it go. And it is a beautiful thing to see kids letting themselves get carried away by the beat.

Dusk approaches, and guests start to drift away, though some stay to help pack up the food and wash the plates. And while we finish our last glass of wine, two of the drummers perform a special fire dance as thanks to Tadaaki and me. With the insistent pound of the drums punctuating his moves, the first dancer, bare chest glistening in the firelight, swings two chains attached with round balls of fire in the darkness. He spins his chains round and round, painting circles of fire. I am mesmerized by the fire and wish for my camera but do not want to break the mood. The next dancer emerges from behind a tree and joins the first, who smoothly yields the “floor.” This second dancer twirls his long pole with two burning cloth ends, sometimes tossing and catching the pole in the air. And the drum beats on. Powerful and elemental. Under the trees. In the dark. A moment in time never to be repeated and impossible to capture on film or paper.





When we were first married, Tadaaki loved to make fish *nabe* because they were easy and we always had lots of vegetables. After a while, I told him enough with the *nabe*, and we stopped eating them for a couple of years. Typically Shabu-Shabu (page 97) is prepared with beef, but one day Tadaaki had the inspiration to make fish shabu-shabu, perhaps because he knew I wasn't fond of oversimmered foods and we don't eat much beef. A brilliant idea, it became a favorite dish of the whole family. But this time around, we were careful not to overuse it, despite the fact that it was exquisite, a snap to throw together (especially if you use precut sashimi fish instead of curing kelp-wicked fish), and convivial to boot.

You will need a portable tabletop gas burner to make this dish at the table.

kelp-wicked red snapper shabu-shabu

SERVES 8

MADAI KOBUJIME NO SHABU-SHABU

Kelp-Wicked Red Snapper (page 227)

16 shiitake mushrooms, woody stem bottoms removed

2 bunches bitter greens, such as mustard or turnip, cut into 2-inch (5-cm) lengths

2 (10.5-ounce/300-g) blocks Japanese-style "cotton" tofu, cut into 8 pieces

2 or 3 (6-inch/15-cm) pieces of konbu

Country-Style Ponzu (page 309)

Cooked Japanese rice, for serving

Remove the konbu from the prepared kelp-wicked fish and line two small plates with it. Slice the fish into ¼-inch (6-mm) thick pieces at a diagonal. Lay each sliced filet on top of the konbu-lined plates.

Arrange the vegetables attractively on a platter or basket. Put the tofu on two small plates. Fill a clay pot (*donabe*) or flameproof casserole one-third full with water and add the dried pieces of konbu (not the ones that were used to wick the fish). Take all the ingredients to the table and place the clay pot on the gas burner.

Start up the tabletop burner and bring the water to a boil. Add some of each kind of vegetable and several pieces of tofu. Once the vegetables are just cooked (the greens should still remain brightly colored), lower the flame. Ladle out some broth with a little of each kind of vegetable and a piece of tofu into a small bowl set in front of each guest. Flavor with a splash of ponzu to taste. Guests should grasp a piece of kelp-wicked snapper with their own chopsticks and swish in the simmering broth for a second or until no longer raw but still translucent in the center. (This swishing action sounds like *shabu-shabu*, hence the name.) Dip in the ponzu-flavored broth and eat the vegetables and tofu between bites of fish.

continued on next page

kelp-wicked red snapper shabu-shabu



Do not replenish the vegetables or tofu until guests eat all of the first batch (otherwise you'll end up with an unsightly mixture of gray vegetables and green). Serve with a small bowl of Japanese rice.

VARIATIONS: Any kind of pleasantly flavored white fish will work for this delicate *nabe*. Mizuna or even *mitsuba* would be excellent alternatives to the bitter greens, but they will cook much more quickly. In this case, begin by cooking just the shiitake and tofu, then add these tender greens several minutes later. Feel free to use another kind of Japanese-style or local mushroom in place of the shiitake.

Shabu-Shabu was the favorite dish eaten at the obligatory end-of-the-year parties (*bonenkai*) that I attended when first in Japan. One-pot cooking (*nabemono*) is ridiculously easy, so you have to wonder why these parties took place at restaurants. I didn't really think about it at the time because everything was new and I was just lapping up all there was to see, taste, and learn. The first time I had shabu-shabu was six months into my stay in Japan. I still wasn't accustomed to the fat surrounding the thinly sliced meat, so I picked off what I could. But that was a bit silly (and in retrospect, embarrassing), since the fat quantity was minimal and some is necessary for giving richness to this very simple but elegant preparation.

You will need a portable tabletop gas burner to make this dish at the table.

shabu-shabu SERVES 6

16 shiitake mushrooms, woody stem bottoms removed

¼ head napa cabbage, cut crosswise into 2-inch (5-cm) lengths

4 thin *negi* (Japanese leeks) or spring onions, cut into 2-inch (5-cm) lengths

1½ pounds (700 g) marbled sirloin, sliced crosswise into ¾-inch (2.5-mm) thin sheets by a butcher (see Note)

2 (10.5-ounce/300-g) blocks Japanese-style “cotton” tofu, cut into 8 pieces each

2 or 3 (6-inch/15-cm) pieces of konbu

Country-Style Ponzu (page 309)

Cooked Japanese rice, for serving

Arrange the vegetables attractively on a platter or basket. Lay the meat slices on another platter or have the butcher slice them directly onto your own platter in his shop. Put the tofu on two small plates. Fill a clay cookpot (*donabe*) or flameproof casserole one-third full with water and add the konbu. Take all the ingredients to the table and place the clay pot on the gas burner.

Bring the water to a boil over high heat on the tabletop burner. Reduce the flame to a lively simmer, and add some of each kind of vegetable and several pieces of tofu. Once the vegetables are just cooked (the cabbage should be soft but not starting to discolor), lower the flame to a gentle simmer. Ladle out some of the broth with a little of each kind of vegetable and a piece of tofu into a small bowl set in front of each person. Flavor the broth in the bowls with a small splash of ponzu to taste.

Each person picks up a piece of sirloin with his or her own chopsticks and swishes it in the simmering broth for a couple seconds or until no longer raw but still slightly pink. Dip in the ponzu-flavored broth and eat with the vegetables and tofu. Do not replenish the vegetables or tofu until guests eat all of the first batch. Serve with a small bowl of Japanese rice.

VARIATIONS: I am particularly fond of peppery mizuna greens and bright *mitsuba* leaves—either would go well with the delicate meat. *Shimeji* mushrooms (or chanterelles!) would also be an excellent substitute for the more meaty shiitake.

NOTE: If you are able, prepare a platter for the butcher to lay the meat slices in an overlapping pattern. This will make serving much easier (and prettier).



Nancy Singleton Hachisu grew up in a Japanese-inspired house on a woodsy back lot in Atherton, California, one of six children. A year in Southern California and another in Belgium prompted Nancy's return to the San Francisco Bay Area for college at Stanford University.

Captivated by the world of sushi, Nancy left California for Japan in July of 1988, intending to learn Japanese and return to the U.S. for graduate school. Instead, she fell in love with organic farmer Tadaaki Hachisu (who had spent a year in Brazil as a cowboy). They married at the end of 1989 and have three sons.

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