

The background is a rich, textured collage of Japanese culinary elements. At the top left, there are two small dark bowls filled with a light-colored liquid, possibly soy sauce or tea, next to a small brown teapot. Below them are fresh green scallions and a bundle of dried, golden-brown rice stalks. On the right side, there are several bright orange citrus fruits, likely daidai (citrus), and a black plate with a piece of salmon topped with green herbs. In the lower right, a wooden bowl is filled with white rice, with a pair of wooden chopsticks resting on top. The bottom of the image features a variety of fresh seafood, including several pieces of nigiri sushi with salmon and tuna, a whole cooked crab, and a selection of mushrooms, some of which are carved into star shapes. The entire scene is set against a dark, vertically-grained wooden background.

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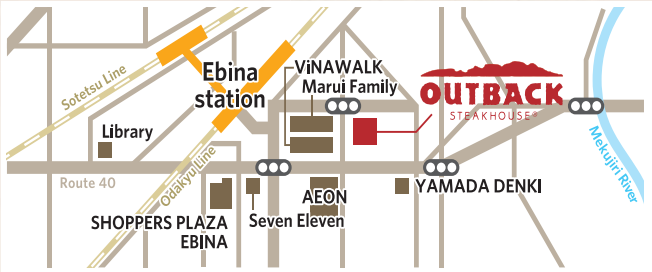


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RESTAURANT INFO

6 kabocha recipes

that'll turn you into a Japanese pumpkin lover

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JORDAN GREEN,
BYFOOD

The coming of autumn brings the arrival of kabocha, Japanese pumpkin, to our supermarket shelves. But how does one actually cook and prepare Japanese pumpkin?

This hard-skinned squash can be a tricky ingredient to work with but with an abundance of kabocha recipes from roasted kabocha squash to kabocha pie out there, we'd be foolish not to create a quick round up of some of our favorite kabocha dishes for autumn.



File photo

1 Japanese kabocha salad



Courtesy photos

If you've ever made potato salad, pumpkin salad is a very simple task. For this recipe you'll need:

- Pumpkin 300g
- Bacon 30g
- Half a cucumber 50g
- Salt to taste
- Pepper to taste
- Mayonnaise 2-3 tbsp

■ Slice through the pumpkin and place it in a pot of boiling water on the stove until it's easily pierced with a fork.

■ As the pumpkin cooks, start prepping your other ingredients; kabocha salad requires thinly-sliced cucumber so grab your sharpest knife and slice half a cucumber into perfectly thin circles.

■ Once the pumpkin is soft, place it in a bowl to cool while you fry your bacon. If you want to add another texture to the dish, perhaps frying the bacon until crisp is best.

■ After the bacon is fried, place it in a bowl with the pumpkin and mix. You want to mix and slightly crush the pumpkin without smoothing it out into a fine paste, we're not making mashed potato here. Once combined, taste for seasoning and serve.

For those of you who are going down the list and cooking each item one at a time, it's at this stage I can offer you a tip. For the pumpkin salad, instead of using plain boiled pumpkin use your leftover nimono (if any) as a substitution and carefully mix with mayo, pepper, cucumber, and bacon. If you are using the nimono you won't require any extra salt as the pumpkin will already be perfectly seasoned.

Pro Tip: When making the potato salad with nimono instead of boiled pumpkin, be careful when mixing as the nimono pumpkin is a lot softer than you might think and over-mixing will lead to more of a, albeit delicious, pumpkin mash.

2 Kabocha dango



Kabocha dango is an easy way to introduce kabocha to a fussy eater. The kabocha's simple flavors shine through in this simple dish, and while it only contains two ingredients, the dish is infinitely customizable. With the ability to transform into a sweet or savory dish, the possibilities for kabocha are endless. For this dish you'll need:

- Kabocha 140g
- Potato starch 1 tbsp

■ Carefully slice the kabocha into manageable pieces and steam or boil them until they are easily pierced with a fork. If you don't have a steamer you can boil or microwave the kabocha; anything to get them soft.

■ Once soft, move the cooked kabocha into a bowl and allow it to cool for a few minutes. Take the cooled kabocha and mash it into a paste and then add the potato starch. The starch will firm up the kabocha, allowing it to be easily shaped.

■ Shape the kabocha into disks and place them to one side for frying (this is the perfect time to get little helpers involved).

■ If you want to place anything inside the dango, this is the stage to do it. Azuki paste goes surprisingly well with kabocha dango, while chocolate can be hit or miss. Try out a few different ingredients and see which one you enjoy the most.



■ Once the kabocha has been shaped into discs, place them into a hot pan with a little oil and fry them on both sides until the kabocha browns. Plate up and serve them to what I'm sure are hungry little helpers.

■ For more savory dango, add a little salt and pepper during the mixing process and instead of frying the dango, boil it in a little seasoned broth or add it to a vegetable soup of your choosing for a little extra texture.

3 Kabocha no nimono



In Japanese cuisine, cooking food by boiling or stewing it is referred to as nimono. Although simple, this cooking method can create dishes overflowing with complex flavors and textures, and when pumpkin is prepared using this style, the full range of flavors can be uncovered.

To cook your own kabocha no nimono at home, you'll need the following ingredients:

- Water 300ml
- Pumpkin 300g
- Granulated dashi 1 tbsp
- Soy sauce 1 tbsp
- Sugar 1 tbsp
- Salt 1/4 tsp
- Sake 1 tbsp

■ Start by scooping the seeds and pulp out of your kabocha pumpkin and rinse it under warm water, making sure to clean the skin well, as it is edible and we will be using it in this dish. Slice your pumpkin into slightly larger than bitesize pieces and place it to one side.

■ Once you have cut your pumpkin into slices, start on your nimono broth, heating up 300ml of water in a medium size pot. After the water begins to heat up, add your dashi to the pot and allow it to dissolve completely before adding the rest of your seasonings.

■ Stir until all the seasonings have completely combined with the dashi mixture, and then add your pumpkin to the newly-formed broth. The pumpkin shouldn't be completely submerged in the water; as long as the pumpkin is at least 80% submerged, the nimono will turn out just fine.



■ With the heat set low, slowly simmer the pumpkin in the broth. This will give the pumpkin a chance to absorb all the flavors of the broth while it cooks. Allow the pumpkin to slowly simmer on a low to medium heat for 20-45 minutes depending on how large your pumpkin pieces are.

■ Once the pumpkin is tender enough to be easily pierced with a fork, it's ready. Remove from the heat and serve.

Sadly, the broth isn't really for drinking and can be thrown out once the pumpkin is ready.

Pro Tip: Leaving the skin on the pumpkin allows for the finished nimono to have an extra layer of texture.



An unmistakable American classic, the pumpkin pie is a delicious autumn treat. By using kabocha, we can adapt this American classic from an American pumpkin pie to a Japanese kabocha pie!

We will need the following ingredients:

- Pie dough (ready-made or homemade)
- Kabocha pumpkin 450g
- Unsalted butter 30g
- 1 large egg yolk
- 2 eggs
- 72g brown sugar
- 200ml whipping cream (double cream)
- 2 tsp pumpkin pie spice (1 tbsp cinnamon, 2 tsp nutmeg, ½ tsp ginger, ½ tsp cloves and ½ tsp allspice)
- Sugar 30g
- ½ tsp salt
- Splash of rum (optional)



While the name is shared with its spicy Chinese counterpart, this pumpkin-infused dish has an entirely different flavor. For this recipe, you'll need these ingredients:

- Minced beef 200g
- Half an onion
- Soy sauce 1½ tsp
- Mirin ½ tsp
- Kabocha - 200g
- Dashi 1 tsp
- Ginger 2 tsp
- Finely-sliced chili (optional)

■ Cut your kabocha into large chunks and place them in a steamer or a pot of hot water to cook until soft.

■ While the kabocha softens, slice your onion into small pieces and place it into a hot pan with a little butter. Slowly cook the onions until they have softened, then add your minced beef.

■ Fry the minced beef until it has gained a little color and then add your spices. For those who are using fresh ginger, slice the ginger into thin shards and then add them to the mix. For those using a pre-crushed ginger, about a half a tablespoon will do.

■ Mix well before adding in your steamed pumpkin to the pan. Fold the pumpkin into the mixture so as to not break apart the pumpkin into too small pieces.

■ Allow the mixture to simmer for a few minutes before serving on top of rice.

Pro Tip: For lovers of spicy food, a finely sliced chili will be a great addition (note that a little added spice goes a long way in this dish).

Pro Tip 2: This dish also works well with udon; just increase the water from 20ml to 30-40ml to create more of a soup for the udon noodles to cling to.



■ Start by cutting your kabocha. For this dish, the skin is not needed. Kabocha skin is pretty tough, so consider peeling it after the kabocha has been cooked if you don't own a relatively sharp peeler.

■ Once sliced into manageable pieces, steam or boil the pumpkin until soft. Remove the kabocha skin, placing the cooked pumpkin into a separate bowl, and start on your pumpkin spice.

■ Those without pre-made pumpkin spice can easily recreate this classic with a few supermarket spices. In a small bowl mix together 1 tablespoon of cinnamon, 2 teaspoons of ground ginger, and half a teaspoon each of allspice, ground cloves and nutmeg. This should yield around 2 tablespoons of pumpkin spice.



■ For those who own a food processor, blitz the cooked pumpkin until smooth and silky. For those without a processor, the same result can be achieved with a potato masher, a fork, or even a spoon, but a little more effort might be required.

■ Find yourself a large bowl and mix together your unsalted butter and white sugar until combined. Once the mixture has fully combined, add your eggs and egg yolk to the butter-sugar mixture and whisk until fully incorporated.

■ This is when we want to add our smooth pumpkin paste to the party. Fold and whisk the pumpkin paste into the mixture until an orange-y batter is formed.

■ Next, we want to add our dry ingredients: brown sugar, a pinch of salt, and our homemade pumpkin spice.

■ Whisk together well before slowly adding our double cream to the mix bit by bit, whisking in between additions. For those who want to make a more adult version, add a splash of rum to the batter and stir it in alongside the double cream.



■ While a shallow or deep pie crust will create a delicious pumpkin pie, for those looking for more traditional American style pumpkin pie, a deeper dish should be used.

■ Add your pumpkin pie filling to your chosen pie crust and place it into an oven preheated to 170-180 degrees Celsius (around 338-356F) for around 45-50 minutes. If you are using a shallower pie crust, lower the oven temperature to around 160 degrees Celsius (320F) and cook for around 35-45 minutes.

■ Allow the pie to cool for at least an hour before digging in. This classic is best served with a heaping helping of homemade whipped cream.

From sweet to savory and everything in between, kabocha, or Japanese pumpkin, is an amazingly flexible ingredient able to take the form of an afternoon snack, a full meal, or even a dessert.



These bitesize kabocha korokke (croquettes) are the perfect addition to the dinner table of any pumpkin lover. The crispy, fried outsides paired with the slightly sweet kabocha within create a sweet-salty balance that is very moreish.

For this simple kabocha korokke you'll need to prepare a few ingredients:

- Kabocha 300g
- Onion 1 small
- Bacon 20g
- Butter for frying
- Oil for frying
- Flour
- 1 Egg
- Salt and pepper
- Panko crumbs

■ Prepare your kabocha by steaming or boiling it until the kabocha is soft and malleable. For those without a steamer, you can always opt for microwave steaming. Place the sliced kabocha into a bowl with a little water, cover the bowl with plastic wrap, and microwave, checking every 35-40 seconds to make sure the kabocha isn't overcooking.

■ Chop the onions into small pieces and fry in a pan with some butter. After the onions start to get a little color, add your bacon to the mixture and fry until cooked. Once the onion-bacon mixture is complete, place it into a separate bowl with the cooked pumpkin. Bacon and kabocha pair very well in this korokke but the protein element of this dish is pretty flexible and thus customization is welcomed!

■ Add a little salt and pepper into the kabocha mixture and begin to mash and stir the kabocha until combined. The mixture should have the same consistency as mashed potato when complete.

■ Sprinkle a little flour onto your work surface and hands and begin to form small slightly larger than bitesize balls with the kabocha mixture. Flour is your best friend at this stage as the mixture will be very sticky and a little hard to work with.

■ Place your kabocha balls into the fridge to firm up for around 10-15 minutes.

■ Then, take the balls out of the fridge and coat them first with a beaten egg, and then into panko crumbs.

■ Fry the korokke in small batches so as to not overcrowd each other in the oil, and finish with a final sprinkle of salt.

Perfect kabocha korokke for any occasion.

Pro Tip: Keeping the kabocha skin on is perfectly fine; the final korokke will just have a darker color inside. For those who want a brighter orange color, consider peeling the kabocha before steaming or boiling it.

byFood is a platform for food events in Tokyo, with over 80 experiences to choose from and a fantastic resource for learning about Japan's thriving food culture! What's more, byFood runs a charitable outreach program, the Food for Happiness Project, which donates 10 meals to children in Cambodia for each person who books a food event through our platform!





12 must-try fall foods in Japan

BY ANNE UEKI,
BYFOOD

A temperature shift from sweltering heat to mild and pleasant, the comforting smell of roasted sweet potatoes fills the air, and

chestnut-themed cafe menus can only mean one thing: the fall season has begun.

As the vibrant hues of summer gradually give way to the warm, earthy tones of fall, Japan undergoes a culinary transformation that is nothing short of magical. Fall in Japan brings

forth a treasure trove of seasonal ingredients and dishes, each meticulously crafted to capture the essence of this breathtaking time of year. Join us on a journey through Japan's unmissable fall foods, followed by a trip to the supermarket or your nearest restaurant or cafe!



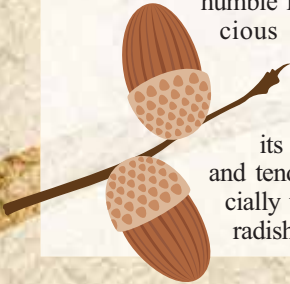
Matsutake Mushrooms (松茸)

The revered matsutake mushrooms are the undisputed kings of the Japanese forest. Their distinct aroma and flavor make them highly sought after and an essential part of traditional Japanese cuisine. Matsutake mushrooms boast an earthy, spicy aroma that is unlike any other. Their rich, meaty texture and subtle, nutty flavor add depth to a variety of dishes. You'll find matsutake in sukiyaki, clear broths, and rice dishes. They symbolize the season and are integral to fall traditions like tsukimi (moon-viewing).



Sanma (サンマ) Pacific Saury

Sanma, or Pacific saury, is a migratory fish that travels to Japanese waters in the fall. This humble fish is celebrated for its delicious flavor and affordable price, making it a seasonal staple. Sanma is often salted and grilled whole, emphasizing its natural oils. The crispy skin and tender flesh are a delight, especially with a dash of grated daikon radish and soy sauce.



Kuri (栗) Chestnuts

Chestnuts, or kuri, are synonymous with fall in Japan. These glossy brown gems are not only a symbol of the season but also a versatile ingredient. From chestnut rice (kuri gohan) that combines its nuttiness with perfectly cooked grains to chestnut mont blanc desserts that showcase their sweet side, this seasonal ingredient lends itself to both savory and sweet creations.



Ginnan (銀杏) Ginkgo Nuts

Strolling down the streets of Japan in the fall, you might come across the distinct aroma of roasting ginkgo nuts. These pale green nuggets have a slightly bitter flavor that pairs beautifully with various dishes. You'll find them in chawanmushi (savory egg custard) or hidden within fragrant rice, adding a delightful crunch. Ginkgo nuts are typically roasted or boiled, which removes the bitterness associated with their raw state. Once prepared, they make for a crunchy and slightly sweet snack, often enjoyed with a sprinkle of salt.



Budou (ぶどう) Grapes

Grapes are another delightful autumn fruit in Japan, especially in vineyard-rich regions like Yamanashi and Nagano. Japanese grapes are celebrated for their exceptional quality and varieties. Japan cultivates numerous grape varieties, including the celebrated Kyoho and Shine Muscat. Kyoho grapes are known for their enormous size and intense, sweet flavor, while Shine Muscat grapes offer a delightful muscat aroma and a crisp, juicy texture.



Kaki (柿) Persimmon

Kaki, or persimmons, are a quintessential autumn fruit in Japan. Their vibrant orange hues adorn trees across the country, making them an emblematic symbol of the season. Japanese persimmons are known for their sweetness and unique texture. The two primary varieties are Fuyu and Kaki. Fuyu persimmons are crisp and can be enjoyed like apples, often sliced and eaten raw. Kaki persimmons, on the other hand, are sweeter and are typically enjoyed when fully ripe and soft.



Nashi Pear (梨)

Nashi pears, often referred to as Asian pears, are another highlight of Japan's fall bounty. These crisp and juicy fruits are a refreshing addition to the seasonal palate and are enjoyed for their taste and versatility. Nashi pears are prized for their refreshing sweetness, which is balanced by a slight tartness. You can enjoy these pears fresh or in various culinary applications. You'll sometimes find them in salads, where their crispness adds a delightful crunch. Nashi pears can also be found in desserts, where their natural sweetness enhances the overall taste.



Yaki-imo (焼き芋) Roasted Sweet Potato

Fall means the aroma of roasted sweet potatoes wafting through the air. Yaki-imo, or roasted sweet potatoes, are a common sight in Japan during the fall. Street vendors often sell them from trucks equipped with wood-burning stoves, creating a nostalgic and comforting experience for all who pass by. Sweet potatoes also appear in tempura and a range of traditional Japanese sweets.



Nabe (鍋) Hot Pot

Nabe, or hot pot, is the epitome of comfort food in the fall and winter. This communal dish is not only warming but also highly customizable. As the temperatures drop, Japanese households turn to nabe, a hot pot dish that brings family and friends together. There are countless nabe variations, but the most popular in the fall include sukiyaki and yosenabe. Suki-yaki features thinly sliced beef, vegetables and tofu cooked in a sweet and savory soy-based broth, while yosenabe is a throw-everything-in hot pot filled with seasonal ingredients.



Oden (御田)

Oden is a hearty one-pot stew known for its simplicity and rich flavors. This beloved Japanese dish holds a special place in the hearts of locals, offering a comforting and soul-soothing experience during the brisk fall season. It typically consists of a simmering broth, often dashi (a savory fish and seaweed stock), filled with various ingredients that absorb the savory essence of the broth as they gently cook. While the ingredients can vary by region and personal preference, common additions include daikon radish, boiled eggs, konnyaku (a jelly-like yam cake), fish cakes and tofu.



Shinmai (新米) New Harvest Rice

The arrival of shinmai, or new harvest rice, is a highly anticipated event in Japan. Harvested in the fall, shinmai rice is celebrated for its exceptional quality. It's characterized by its tender texture and sweet, nutty flavor that sets it apart from rice harvested in other seasons. Shinmai is typically enjoyed in its simplest form: as a bowl of freshly steamed rice. Its delicate flavor and slightly sticky texture make it the perfect accompaniment to a wide range of Japanese dishes, from sushi and sashimi to tempura and hearty rice bowls. It represents the bounty of the harvest season and the idea of renewal and fresh beginnings.



Nihonshu (日本酒) Sake

Sake, Japan's take on rice wine, takes center stage in the fall. Sake brewing is closely tied to the changing seasons, making fall a highly-anticipated time for sake enthusiasts. During this time of year, breweries release a special type of sake known as hiyaoroshi. This sake is brewed in the spring and then aged over the summer. It's typically milder and smoother than sake served fresh in the spring, making it a favorite for autumnal gatherings and festivals.

In Japan, the changing seasons are celebrated with gusto, and fall is no exception. From street food stalls and convenience stores to local cafes and restaurants, fall foods in Japan make their mark — and we're here for it!

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File photos

The season of miso

BY JOAN BAILEY,
METROPOLIS MAGAZINE

Every January, after the New Year celebrations end and the decorations get put away, Yayoi Minowa turns her attention to miso. Once a week, from January to March, she will boil beans, measure salt, stir in koji (mold grown on rice that is essential for making miso), smash the beans, and stuff the mixture into 18-kilogram barrels. These will, in turn, be stored in a cool dark place to while away the spring and summer months. Come October the contents have gone a ruddy brown with the fermentation process. They are then hauled out again to be eaten as soup, dip, or any other delicious thing imaginable.

"We usually end in March because we start seeding around then," Yayoi says before bending to peer at the gauge of one of the three giant pressure cookers, which are perched over blue gas flames on this bright February morning. The whole process, she explains, takes three days.

"On Monday, we steam the rice and mix it with the koji. It's ready by

Wednesday so we start soaking the beans. By Friday they are ready to be cooked, and we can make the miso," she explains.

The beans in use are koitodaizu, a local or heirloom variety of soybean from the Matsuo area of Chiba where the Minowa family have lived and farmed for generations. The beans are small and pale with a sweet flavor that locals believe make a perfect miso.

"The amount of salt used depends on the area," Yayoi says, opening the lid of one of the giant pots. She presses a single bean between her thumb and pinky, and nods as it easily squishes. This is a sign that they are fully cooked. "In the North, the miso is saltier, but in Kyushu it tends to be sweet. Although," she reflects, "that may be because they grow their koji on wheat there."

Steam rolls out as she lifts an inner pot that looks like a giant strainer. The beans are spread in a large pan in which they are allowed to cool while the process is repeated with the other two pots. Once lukewarm, Tomohito, Yayoi's son, adds the rice-koji-salt mixture to the beans and begins to blend them by hand. Outside, the sun waves through the branches of bamboo nearby, moving

in the spring breeze.

Fifty years ago, miso was made outdoors in a big pot over a fire pit. It took about half a day, Yayoi says, and the beans were mashed using their feet. "Every farm made miso for their own family," she said.

The Minowas do not press the mixture with their feet, but use something akin to a meat grinder to smash the beans. Yayoi watches as Tomohito pours the beans into the top and then grabs handfuls of the bean-koji-salt mixture as it emerges. She quickly shapes it into a ball and throws it into the barrel she lined with coarse salt.

"Throwing knocks out the air," she tells me between tosses, which would make any baseball team proud. The smack of their landing resounding through the kitchen. She continues this until the barrel is full, pressing firmly on the top and smoothing it before placing the lid securely in place and starting the next one.

Local governments began to set up community kitchens in the 1960s to encourage rural women to create cottage industries around their traditional food skills. Over time though, as the exodus from the



File photos

country to the city continued, these kitchens and the traditional knowledge they supported are beginning to disappear.

The Minowas hope to change that. Their annual miso-making workshop brings people together to learn how to do it for themselves and build a little community in the process. A renewed interest in traditional foods and practices has brought people together to make it, to learn, and to socialize. In exchange for a fee that pays for the ingredients and kitchen rental, participants get a hands-on lesson in miso-making and by October, a tasty share of the bounty.

"What is harvested from this land is suitable for making miso in this land," Yayoi says as the last barrel is filled and capped. Words to eat by, if you ask me.



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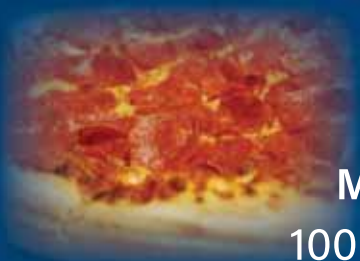


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