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A Taste of Okinawa

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Kanten Japanese jelly a sweet, healthy alternative

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA,
STRIPES OKINAWA

As a kid, every New Year I would look forward to a sweet jelly called kouhaku kanten. Kanten is a jelly made from boiled ten-gusa algae and seaweed. It is known for being low-calorie and rich in fiber, so it is often used as a healthy alternative to regular sweets.

If you are a foodie, you may have heard of or tried tokoroten, another Japanese food with a similar jelly texture to kanten. Though both tokoroten and kanten look the same, tokoroten retains some smell of the sea (weed) and kanten does not. This is because kanten is frozen and dried after boiling, which casts off the ocean odor.

According to officials of Nagano Prefecture, a major producing area of kanten, this unique food recipe was accidentally discovered by a lodging owner in Kyoto during the Edo Period (1603 – 1868). Tokoroten, on the other hand, can be traced earlier to the Heian Era (794 – 1185).

Back in the Edo times, it may have taken a lot of time and effort to create kanten from red algae, but these days konakanten, powdered kanten, saves us time. Konakanten is mixed with water and milk and once set with fruit, creates a photogenic food which has recently become a popular sweet to cook at home.

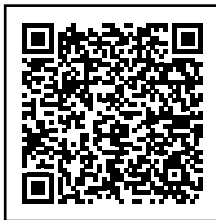
I found the recipe below online to try my hand at making the healthy and eye-catching treat. It was fun to mold the white jelly in a milk carton and see the way canned fruit can add vibrant colors to it. And most importantly, it tasted great and the soft texture was delightful.

Making this dish was probably the least difficult of any of the previous dishes I've tried. The recipe did call for any cutting or slicing ingredients, so it only required time to heat the milk, water and condensed milk.

Though hearing that kanten is made from algae may make you second-guess trying it, I guarantee that after the first bite you will not care what it is made from. It is that delicious!

Why don't you try kanten and find what this unique Japanese food tastes like?
kudaka.shoji@stripes.com

 CHECK OUT THE VIDEO



INGREDIENTS Recipe adapted from Cookpad

- Milk (600 ml) ■ Water (100 ml) ■ Powdered kanten (4 g)
- Sugar (40 g) ■ Condensed milk (30 g) ■ Vanilla essence (a splash)
- Canned fruit, strained (one can of whatever fruit you like)
- Empty milk carton, washed (I used a milk carton with 946 ml capacity. Any size over 800 ml would suffice.)

DIRECTIONS

1 Pour the milk and condensed milk in a heat-resistant bowl. Microwave the mixture for three minutes (600w).



2 Measure out sugar and powdered kanten into the water in a pot over low heat. Stir the mixture while heating it. Once the mixture starts to boil, heat for two more minutes.



3 Next, add the microwaved milk and condensed milk to the pot and continue to heat the mixture over low heat. Remove from heat once mixture reaches a thick consistency.



Tip: Test the consistency by adding a drop to a wooden spatula. If the mixture runs, it is not ready. If the spot of the mixture sticks, then it is ready.

4 Mix in the vanilla essence then pour the mixture into an empty milk carton. (Make sure the milk carton is washed well). Tip: Pour the mixture through a tea strainer to keep your final product smooth.



5 Add in the strained canned fruit.

6 Close the milk carton and apply a laundry clipper to secure the top opening. Once it cools down, put it in the fridge to let it set for several hours (I refrigerated it overnight).



7 To remove the kanten, pour a splash of water to loosen it from the milk carton and gently slide it onto a plate. Alternatively, cut through an edge of the carton and use a splash of water to ease the process.



8 Cut into even portions, serve and enjoy with tea or coffee. いただきます (Bon appetite)!



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RESTAURANT INFO

A Taste of Okinawa

RESTAURANT & SUSHI BAR GEN

STARS & STRIPES BEST OF THE PACIFIC 2013 WINNER

We're located just outside Camp Foster Globe & Anchor Gate No.3

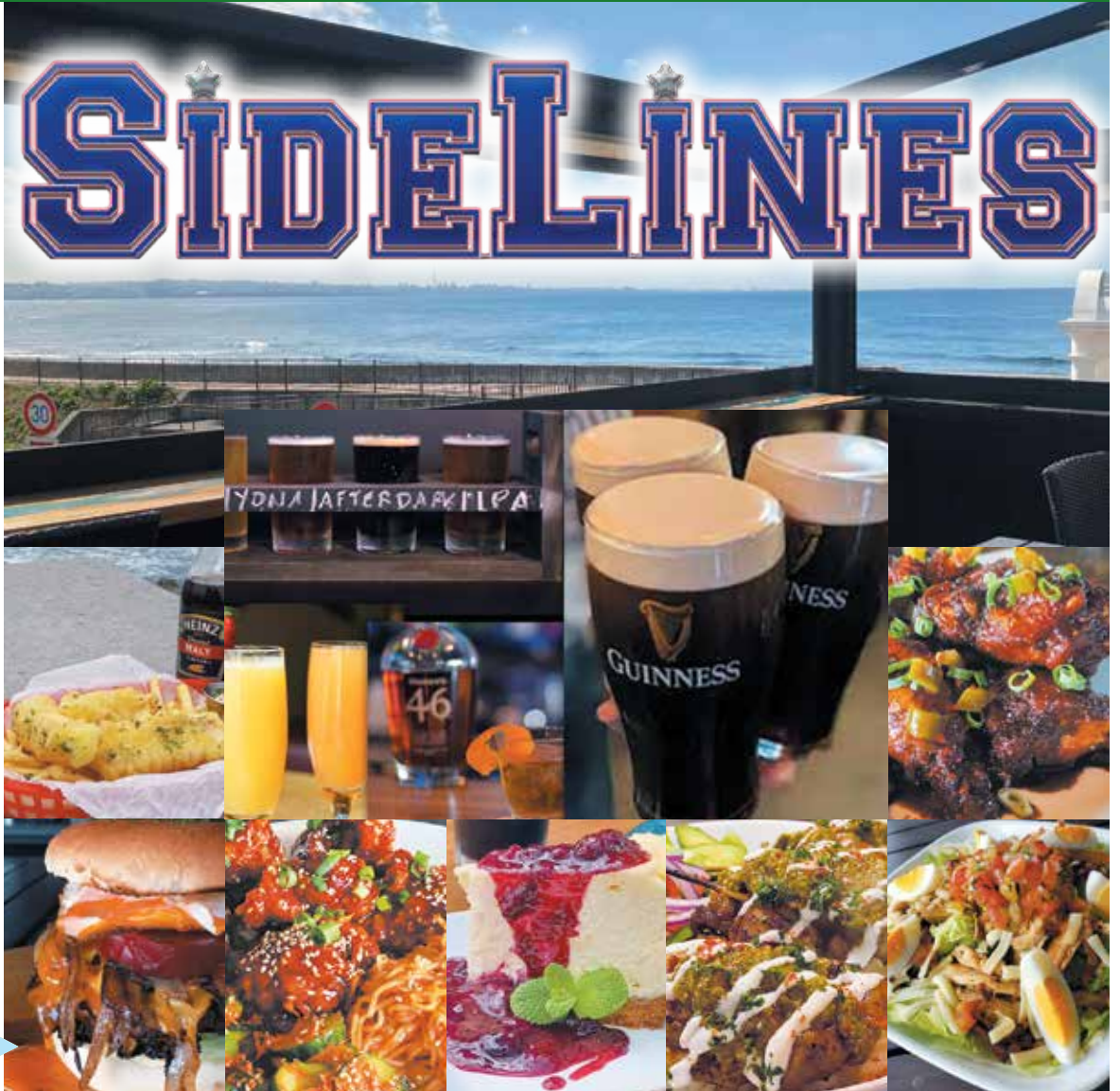
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A Taste of Okinawa

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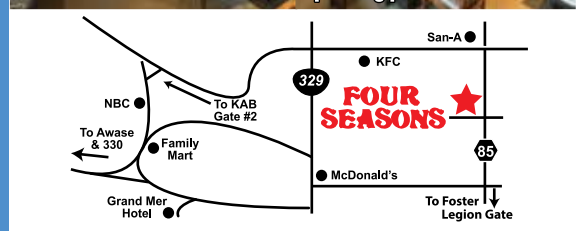
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RESTAURANT INFO