

# Soy-Simmered Vegetables

## Nishimé 煮しめ



Hundreds of variations on this classic dish exist, though basically they are of two sorts:

- (1) Deeply burnished **Kanto-style** nishimé is prepared with regular dark soy sauce; this mélange is favored in and around Tokyo and throughout the northern and eastern parts of Japan
- (2) Delicately hued **Kansai-style** nishimé, simmered with light colored soy sauce is popular in and around Kyoto and in the west and south of Japan.

Depending upon the vegetables I am preparing on any given day, I make some items (such as dried mushrooms, *konnyaku*, kelp knots) in the Kanto-style and others (lotus root, carrots, bamboo shoots, country potatoes) in the Kansai-style.

*Nishimé* could easily appear at table anytime throughout the year, but this particular assortment (and the shape each ingredient takes) is typical of a New Year's arrangement. This dish keeps well at cool room temperature for a day or two, or refrigerated for 4-5 days.

Ingredients (Makes 6-8 servings):

### **Kanto-style vegetables:**

8-12 *hoshi shiitaké* (dried black mushrooms; preferably *donko* variety) soaked in warm water to cover (to which a pinch of sugar has been added) for ½ hour

1 loaf *konnyaku* (gelatinous tuber), sliced *tazuna* style and blanched, then drained (see separate sheet: About KONNYAKU cooking & trivia.pdf).

2 feet or longer strip of *nama kombu* (salted but not dried kelp), rinsed and soaked for 1/2 hour in fresh cold water; optional

2 blocks/loaves *atsu agé* (thick fried *tōfu*) each cut into 3 or 4 pieces OR 3 or 4 *ganmo* (*tōfu* dumplings); optional

### **Kanto-style simmering broth:**

300 (to 450) cc *dashi* (basic stock)

100 (to 200) cc liquid from soaking dried *shiitaké* mushrooms

1 (to 2) tablespoon *saké* (rice wine)

2 (to 3½) tablespoons sugar

3 (to 5½) tablespoons *koi kuchi shōyu* (regular soy sauce)

### **Kansai-style vegetables:**

1 fat carrot (bright red *kyō ninjin* or *kintoki ninjin* is best), cut into 10-15 decorative "plum blossoms" (see separate reference sheet: Carrot Plum Blossoms)

6-8, ½ cm thick slices *renkon* (lotus root), peeled, cut into 1/4-inch slices, soaked in vinegar-water

12 or more snow peas, "string" removed (but tip intact) and briefly blanched

### **Kansai-style simmering broth:**

300 (to 450) cc *dashi* (basic stock)

100 (to 200) cc liquid from soaking dried *shiitaké* mushrooms

1 (to 2) tablespoon *sake* (rice wine)

2 (to 3½) tablespoons *mirin* (syrupy rice wine)

2 (to 4) tablespoons *usukuchi shōyu* (light colored soy sauce)

Procedure: Squeeze out liquid from mushrooms (strain this liquid and reserve it for simmering). Remove stems and rinse caps thoroughly. If large, slice caps in half, slightly on the diagonal.

Remove a loaf of *konnyaku* (tuber aspic), about 7 oz., from its package, draining it well and discarding the packing liquid. Slice and slit the *konnyaku* making multiple braids.

In a wide, shallow pot, combine the basic stock with the mushroom liquid. Add the *saké* and bring to a simmer over low heat. Add the softened mushrooms and *konnyaku* tuber “braids.” Use a “dropped lid” and simmer for 10 minutes skimming away any froth that accumulates.

Add the sugar (if cooking *Kanto*-style) OR the *mirin* (if cooking *Kansai*-style) and simmer preferably using an *otoshi-buta* (dropped lid) for 8 to 10 more minutes. Add more stock and/or mushroom liquid, as needed to keep the vegetables from scorching as they simmer/

Blanch the plum blossom carrots until barely tender, before adding them to the pot with the other vegetables. Add the soy sauce (regular or light, depending on style of cooking) and simmer for another 2 or 3 minutes. Adjust seasoning as needed. Allow all the vegetables to cool to room temperature in the cooking liquid. When ready to serve, scatter blanched snow peas among other vegetables.

Serve family style mounded in a shallow bowl or divide into 4 to 6 individual portions being sure to have several pieces of each of the vegetables in every portion.



Note: A purely vegetarian version of this dish can be made with cubes of fried *tōfu* (*atsu agé*), or meatless “meatballs” called Gan modoki.

Cut the *atsu agé* into 1/2-inch cubes and blanch them (do NOT refresh in cold water), discarding the greasy hot water. Use kelp stock (*kombu dashi*) and/or dried *shiitaké* mushroom broth with kelp (*sankai dashi*) in lieu of standard fish-based sea stock.

**SERVING *nishimé*** ... The classic New Year’s presentation is to place *nishimé* in a multi-tiered box called a *jubako* along with other *osechi* holiday foods. *Nishimé* can also be presented in shallow serving bowls or long platters. Sometimes *nishimé* vegetables are arranged in clusters, other times in a random-like scattered fashion.

