

ハラコ飯 HARAKO MESHI



Salmon Rice Topped with Red Caviar

A signature dish of the Tohoku's Miyagi Prefecture, *Harako Meshi* (literally “parent-child rice”) is featured at many family gatherings. On casual occasions the salmon is likely to be flaked and tossed into the rice as it steams for a final few moments. When divvied up, each person's bowl is topped with a modest spoonful of salmon caviar. On special occasions, many home cooks will present the dish on a large platter garnished with whole slices of cooked salmon and clusters of caviar.

The classic Tohoku preparation makes use of a combination of ordinary table rice (*uruchi mai*) and stickier sweet rice (*mochi-gomé*). Rice dishes made with both varieties are referred to as *okowa*; *okowa* dishes are moist with a slightly chewy texture. The adaptation I offer here makes use of easy-to-source *uruchi mai* only. Using ordinary table rice means the dish can easily be made in an electric rice cooker.

I have made one other adaptation for American cooks: this recipe calls for boneless, skinless filleted salmon. In Japan, salmon slices that still have skin attached are the norm (the skin has been well scaled before the fish is filleted). I have also been a bit generous in the quantity of salmon in relation to rice.

After the main recipe, I provide information about cooking rice in a pot, stove-top. Information on sourcing ingredients in America is a separate document.

THE RECIPE

Serves 4 (as a main course, with soup & pickles) or 8 as a side dish

2 (American-sized) cups Japanese-style raw rice

Water, about 2 cups (amount varies; guidelines provided below in recipe)

6 ounces fresh skinless, boneless salmon fillet

3 tablespoons *saké*

1 tablespoon *usu kuchi shōyu* (light-colored soy sauce)

2 tablespoons soy sauce (*koi kuchi shōyu*)

4 ounces *ikura* (sushi-grade salmon caviar)

Wash the rice well with fresh cold water until the water runs clear. As you rinse and swish uncooked grains of rice a great deal of cloudy *togi-jiru* (starchy water) will result. Frugal households save *togi-jiru* to par-boil root vegetables such as *daikon* or *gob*. *Togi-jiru* can be stored in a jar, refrigerated, for several days.

After draining the washed rice, set it in your stovetop cooking pot or the bowl of an automated rice-cooker. Set aside the rice for 20 to 30 minutes to allow the grains of rice to absorb a bit of the water with which it was washed. The grains of rice will become opaque and appear slightly plumped. As you wait for this to happen, prepare the salmon.



Slice the salmon *sogi-giri* style [left, top] into 2 dozen or more, thin, broad slices.



Mix the *saké* and light-colored soy sauce in a small bowl or deep dish and add the sliced salmon, tossing to coat the pieces [left, bottom].

Allow the salmon to marinate for at least 10 minutes and up to one hour, refrigerated.

In a small saucepan bring the regular soy sauce and 1 cup water to a boil. Adjust heat to maintain a gentle simmer and add the salmon with its marinade. Jiggle the saucepan to keep the slices from sticking to each other. Within 20 or 30 seconds the surface of the slices should lighten in color, becoming opaque (the Japanese call this technique “frosting” *shimo-furi*; right, top).



Remove from the heat and strain, reserving the sliced salmon and soy-broth separately [right, below]. The broth will be used to cook the rice; the blanched salmon will be tossed into the cooked rice before serving the dish.



Take the rice you had set aside and strain it discarding any excess liquid. Place the rice in either a straight-sided 3-quart sized pot (one that has a tight fitting lid) OR place the rice in the bowl of an automated rice-cooker. Measure the liquid you strained from blanching the salmon. Add cold water as needed to make 2 cups liquid. Cook the rice using either the **stovetop method** (see sub-recipe AFTER main recipe) or **using an automated rice-cooker**. If using a rice cooker, make sure you use the cup that came with your machine to measure the raw rice if you want to use the lines on the side of the appliance's bowl as a guide to how much liquid.

Once the rice has finished cooking (by stovetop method that means the final high heat stage has been completed and self-steaming begins; using a rice cooker that means the appliance's cycle has switched from “cook” to “done” or “keep warm”), remove the lid and lay the slices of cooked salmon on top. Quickly re-lid your pot or rice cooker. Allow the rice to stand for at least 5 minutes and up to 20 minutes. Do not toss or “fluff” the rice until ready to serve.



When ready to serve, remove a few of the prettier salmon slices to use as a garnish; set aside. With a *shamoji* paddle or other broad spatula, gently trace the edges of your pot to release the rice. With gentle folding motions, scoop down to the bottom where there is typically a darker crust called *okogé*. Lightly toss to distribute, flaking the remaining pieces of salmon as you do.

Serve the dish on a large platter for a family gathering or divvy up into individual rice bowls and serve immediately, warm. Top each individual portion with some of the reserved (unflaked) salmon slices. Just before bringing to table, place a dollop of red salmon caviar on top of each individual portion. If you will be serving *Harako Meshi* buffet-style, let it cool to room temperature before covering loosely with clear plastic wrap. Keep in a cool spot for up to several hours. Garnish with random clusters of red salmon caviar just before serving.

Some like to scatter chopped green onions to add color, and a more complex flavor.



Harako meshi is a favorite *ekiben* (train station lunch) at Sendai station.



STOVETOP METHOD for COOKING RICE in the Japanese manner:

Place the rice in a sturdy, straight-sided pot. Pour in the measured water (or seasoned liquid you will use for cooking the rice). Ideally, the rice sits in its cooking water for 10 minutes before cooking it. If pressed for time, add 1/2 teaspoon more water. Cover the pot with a tight-fitting lid.

Over high heat, bring the water in the pot to a rolling boil. Do not remove the lid to check on progress. Instead, rely on other clues; you can hear bubbling noises and see the lid begin to dance (the *choro choro* stage described below). This should take about 5 minutes.

Reduce the heat and continue to cook until the water is absorbed; you may hear a low hissing sound (the *naka ppapa* stage described below); about 5 minutes longer.

Increase the heat to high again for 30 seconds to dry off the rice. Remove the pot from the source of heat, still tightly covered. Let the rice stand for at least 10 minutes and up to 30 minutes. This final self-steaming makes more tender grains of rice.

The Japanese have a jingle they sing that describes cooking rice in a pot on a wood-burning stove:

初めチヨロチヨロ、中パッパー、赤子が泣いても、蓋とるな！

Hajimé choro choro, naka ppapa

At first it bubbles, then it hisses.

Akago ga naitemo, futa toru na!

Even if the baby cries (from hunger), don't remove the lid!

