

SHISO MAKI しそ巻き



The Tohoku region is justly famous for its **walnuts** – large, meaty orbs that when roasted and crushed produce an incredibly rich, aromatic paste – and its **Sendai miso** – a full-bodied red (burnished brown, really) fermented soybean paste named after Miyagi Prefecture’s capital city. In this dish the two local champions combine with toasted sesame to make an addictively tasty filling. And, this recipe is a good way to introduce you to a salty-and-sweet *neri miso* (“stir-simmered bean paste”) mixture that has many uses.

In the summertime when herbaceous, fresh **shiso** grows in abundance, nuggets of the nutty filling are wound in the herb’s aromatic leaves before being lightly seared in sesame oil. If you are unable to source fresh *shiso*, try using red-leafed lettuce (trimmed to 2-inch squares) as the wrapper, tossing in whatever fresh herbs, minced, you might have on hand (mint is refreshing, chives are pleasantly spicy). You don’t have to skillet-sear the rolls – the filling is fully cooked and *shiso*, other herbs, and lettuce are usually eaten raw – but you may be surprised at how the slightly bitter herbs and rich miso wrapped in lettuce mellow when heat is applied quickly.

These seed-and-nut miso-stuffed leaves are terrific with an icy beer, chilled *saké*, or hot green tea.

Makes 30 stuffed leaves, 2 to 3 per serving.

neri-miso sauce:

- 3 tablespoon Sendai miso
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 2 tablespoons *saké*
- 2 tablespoons *Dashi* stock or water
- 1 ounce, about 1/4 cup, unsalted, unroasted walnut meats
- 1 tablespoon (whole, untoasted) white sesame seeds
- 30 whole fresh *shiso* leaves
- 1 teaspoon dark, aromatic sesame oil (*goma abura*)



Make the *neri miso*: In a small, heavy saucepan or skillet, combine the *miso*, sugar and *saké*. Stir to mix thoroughly before applying gentle heat. Stirring, cook about 3 minutes until the mixture becomes bubbly, glossy and thickens to the consistency of tomato ketchup (when you scrape the bottom of the pan with a spatula, the stroke remains visible). Remove the pan from the heat and set aside. You can easily double the quantities of this *neri miso* mixture and refrigerate in a tightly capped glass jar for up to 10 days.



Dry roast the nuts and seeds: Heat a small, heavy (preferably wrought-iron) skillet. Add the walnut meats and dry-roast them while lightly shaking, jiggling and swirling the skillet to keep the nutmeats in motion.

When aromatic and lightly colored, remove the walnuts to a *suribachi* (Japanese grooved mortar) to grind them coarsely in the old-fashioned way. Or, transfer the dry-roasted nuts to the bowl of a mini food processor and pulse-blend to a coarse paste.

In the same skillet you used to dry-roast the walnuts, dry roast the sesame seeds over medium-low heat; keep the skillet in motion to prevent the seeds from scorching and popping violently. When aromatic and lightly colored, add the sesame seeds to the walnut paste and briefly grind (in a *suribachi*) or pulse-blend (in a food processor) to combine.



Add the ground seed-and-nut mixture to the *neri-miso* mixture in your saucepan. Stirring over low heat, cook the mixture for 30 seconds or so to combine thoroughly and reduce to a very thick, slightly oily paste (the oiliness is natural and comes from the sesame and walnuts). The final mixture will be quite textured with nuts and seeds. Any extra paste can be stored in a tightly capped glass jar in the refrigerator for up to 5 days, though the nutty aroma begins to fade after 2 or 3 days.

Assemble the rolls: Rinse your *shiso* leaves under cold water; tear off stems. Shake the leaves to remove excess moisture before laying them out on a flat work surface, shiny side up. The broad base should be closest to you, the tapered tip of the leaf facing away. Place a small amount of the walnut-miso mixture in the center of each leaf. Roll up and away (below, center). Align two or three rolls parallel to each other and hold them together with a toothpick (below, right).



Barely coat the surface of a skillet with aromatic sesame oil. Ideally your skillet should be just large enough to hold the skewered stuffed leaves in a single layer. Arrange the stuffed leaves before placing the skillet over medium heat (below, left). As the skillet heats you will hear a sizzling noise and begin to smell the mixture of aromatic herbs and miso. Carefully flip the skewers and sear briefly on the other side. Remove and blot on paper towels before serving, either warm or cooled to room temperature.