

CLASSIC SU MESHI (Rice Used in Most Sushi Dishes)

This recipe **makes 3 cups cooked rice**; enough to make 4 small portions of Scattered Style *Sushi* (*chirashi-zushi*) **OR** 10 mini plump rolls (each using a half-sheet of *nori*) **OR** 35-36 bite-sized “pom poms” each with a topping **OR** 12 clam sushi bundles.

1 and 1/2 cups raw rice (*uruchi mai*), washed until water runs clear, and drained
1 and 2/3 cups cold water + small piece of *kombu* (kelp) soaking in water

STOVETOP METHOD for COOKING RICE:

Place the rice in a sturdy, straight-sided pot. Pour in the *kombu* water. 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. 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 (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.

初めチヨロチヨロ、中パッパ、赤子が泣いても、蓋とるな！

Hajimé choro choro, naka papa, akago ga naitemo, futa toru na!

At first it bubbles, then it hisses. Even if the baby cries, don't remove the lid!

OR

COOK using an ELECTRIC RICE COOKER. If you want to use the lines marked on the inside of the appliance's bowl, be sure you measure the raw rice with the cup measure provided by the manufacturer.



SEASONING the RICE:

To achieve maximum flavor and texture, season the rice while it is still warm and therefore more receptive to adsorbing the seasoned vinegar. Transfer the cooked rice to a large bowl, preferably a wooden *handai*.

sushi su (seasoned rice vinegar) yields about 1 cup:

1 cup of *su* (rice vinegar)
1 tablespoons sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt

Make the *sushi su*: Combine ingredients in a small saucepan. Heat, stirring, until the sugar and salt melts. Refrigerate any leftovers in a lidded glass jar; it will keep for 2 weeks.

Toss the rice with a *shamoji* (paddle) while fanning it with an *uchiwa* (flat fan) to cool without condensation forming. When there are no more clouds of steam rising from the rice, begin to toss it with the seasoned vinegar. Start with just a tablespoonful. Using gentle folding and tossing motions, gradually season the rice with more of the vinegar mixture. Taste occasionally to correct seasoning if need be. If it is very bland after using half the seasoned vinegar, add a spoonful of plain vinegar and/or a generous pinch of salt.

Cover the seasoned rice with a clean damp cloth and clear plastic wrap until ready to use. Do not refrigerate the seasoned rice; it will turn hard and crusty. Attempts to warm it up will result in mushy, tasteless rice. *Sushi* rice is a naturally preserved food and will keep well in a cool room for many hours.

HANDAI 飯台 also called SUSHI OKE すし桶



Handai wooden rice tubs are used when seasoning cooked rice for making *sushi meshi*. The tub I have is 36 centimeters in diameter -- the perfect size for seasoning 4-6 cups of cooked rice. Made of *sawara* (a kind of cedar), banded in copper, and reinforced with *aotaké* ("green" bamboo, above right photo), each tub is hand crafted in the traditional manner. I have one that I have used for more than 30 years. However, even with the best and most diligent care, the wood will become stained with use. In 2008 when I bought another *handai* from Okuda Shoten (below) it cost 4,350 yen + tax.

Okuda Shoten 03-3844-4511; Kappabashi

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Closed Sundays and holidays; open other days 9 am to 5 pm

HUMIDITY level is the most important issue in proper maintenance: if too damp, molds will grow on the wood; if too dry the wood shrinks and the copper bands that help to hold the tub's shape, can slip out of place.

BEFORE YOU USE FOR THE FIRST TIME... remove any packing materials and set the tub in your kitchen sink (or, if not big enough to accommodate the tub, place it in your bathtub). Pour boiling water in the tub and let sit until the water is cool. Repeat, this time adding 1 cup vinegar (*su*) to the boiling water. The vinegar will bleach and disinfect, and help to "cure" the wood while removing the sticky *yani* (sap). Wash with hot water and mild dishwashing detergent, scrubbing with the rough side of a sponge or a bottlebrush. Pay special attention to the circular edge where the side and bottom meet. Rinse thoroughly with hot water. Turn upside down to drain. When dry (still moist to the touch but light again in color), pour in vinegar (about 2-3 tablespoons total) and rub it in with your hand. Turn the tub upside down again and let it dry thoroughly, before placing it upside down in a large plastic bag (45 liter garbage bag size).

WASHING immediately after EACH use. Soak the tub in hot water with mild dishwashing detergent. Scrub with a brush to dislodge any rice grains that may cling to the tub. Rinse with hot water and drain. Rub vinegar (about 2-3 tablespoons total) over the inner surfaces.

STORAGE: Store UPSIDE DOWN so that the (slightly more narrow) bottom is on top. That way, if the copper bands loosen, they will not slip off. In the dry cold months, keep the tub in a tightly closed, large plastic bag (45liter garbage bag size) to seal in moisture. In the hot warm, humid months, keep the bag open to increase air circulation.

Should MOLD (or small insects) appear, rinse the tub with scalding hot water before treating the wooden surfaces with spent green tea leaves. Green tea kills most mold spores that grow on wood, and discourages future development and growth of them. Green tea also keeps insects from taking up residence in the grain of the wood. Since sushi is usually served with green tea infused from *kona cha* (a green, powdery by-product of processing tea leaves), you can use spent bags (or loose tea leaves) to treat your *handai*.



Do not be alarmed if, after several green tea treatments, the wood assumes a mild tea aroma and pale green coloration.