

Salmon and Root Vegetable Chowder with Saké Lees

(*Shaké no Kasu-Jiru*) 鮭の粕汁



This belly-warming fish chowder is standard wintertime fare throughout the Tohoku. Seasoned with *saké kasu*, the fermented lees that are a by-product of brewing *saké*, this chunky soup frequently becomes the main course at family suppers. Every household has its own version of *kasu-jiru* chowder. Use this **BASIC RECIPE** as a point of departure in creating your own house soup. ENJOY!

Makes 4-6 servings.

9 ounces/250 grams root vegetables such as *daikon*, carrots, *gobō* (burdock root), turnips, rutabaga, parsnips, lotus root, potatoes
6 or 7 ounces/200 grams fresh salmon fillet, skin intact
5-6 cups water with 1 small (about 2 x 3 inch/5cm) piece *kombu* (kelp) and 4 dried *shiitaké* caps set to soak in the water for at least 30 minutes and up to 12 hours
3 tablespoons *saké kasu*, about 3/4 ounce/25 grams
2 tablespoon *miso* (preferably Sendai miso) about 3/4 ounce/25 grams
2 scallions, green and white portions, chopped, about 1/3 cup

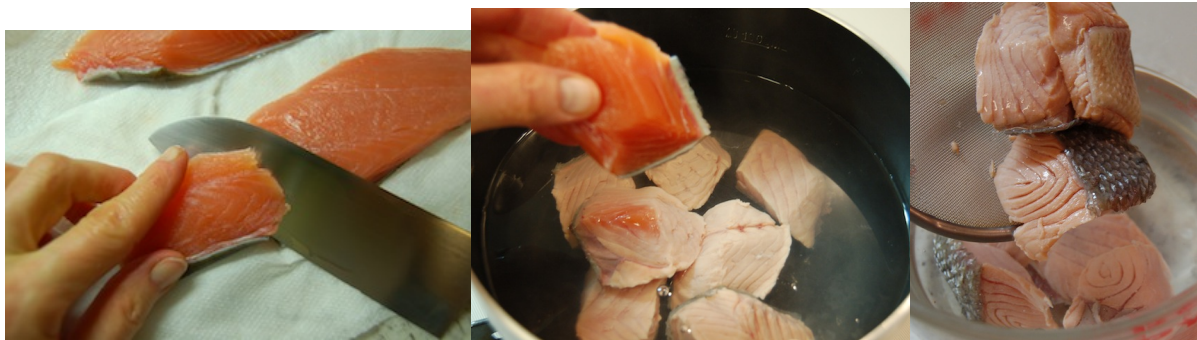
Scrub (*daikon*, carrots, turnips, parsnips, *gobō*) or peel (lotus root, rutabagas, potatoes) vegetables before cutting them into substantial, but manageable, sized chunks, about 3/4-inch (2-cm). As you prepare these, consider which will require longer cooking time – typically *gobō*, rutabaga, lotus and *daikon* – and which will need only brief cooking time – turnips and potatoes tend to crumble quickly. Carrots could go either way; some people like them very soft, others prefer them rather firm.



Remove the softened mushrooms from the water in which they have been soaking. This liquid is a flavorful stock and will be used: do not discard! Rinse the mushroom caps under cold water to remove any gritty material that may be caught in the webbing. Gently press out excess moisture and slice the mushrooms *sogi-giri* style into 12 pieces. Place mushroom pieces, kelp (cut into 4 to 6 strips) and kelp stock in a heavy-duty, 3-quart pot.

Bring to a simmer over medium heat; skim away froth.

Continue to simmer the mushrooms and kelp; add those vegetables that require more time – *gobō*, rutabaga, lotus and *daikon* – and reduce the heat to maintain a steady but not especially vigorous boil as you prepare the salmon.



Rinse the fish under cold water checking that scales have been removed. Pat the fillet dry, place it on your cutting board skin side down and slice it, slightly on the diagonal (this is called *sogi-giri* slicing), into 12 or more pieces.

Bring a pot of water to a rolling boil, and then remove it from the stove. Have a bowl of cold water nearby. Quickly dip the salmon, a few slices at a time, in the extremely hot water removing them to cold water as soon as the surface of the fish pales. This technique for blanching is called *shimo furi* or “frost-falling.” Remove the fish from the cold water and pat dry. You will add these pieces AFTER the vegetables are tender.

Add carrots and cook for a minute before adding potatoes and other vegetables that might crumble with extended exposure to heat. Skim as needed when froth appears. Cook until all the vegetables are tender (a toothpick should meet no resistance). Return the “frosted” salmon to the pot and cook for just one minute to firm the pieces.

Make the *saké kasu* and *miso* mixture: *Saké kasu* can be quite stiff and lumpy. Warming it slightly – zapping it in a microwave for 30 seconds or heating it in the top of a double boiler – will make it easier to get a smooth, pasty consistency. If you have a *miso koshi* strainer place it directly in the soup pot. Place both the *saké kasu* and the *miso* in the bowl of the strainer and using stirring motions, force the *kasu* and *miso* mixture through the mesh into the soup. If you do not have this special strainer, place softened *saké kasu* in a small bowl and ladle in some of the warm soup from the pot. Stir and mash to make a smooth paste before adding the *miso*. Once you have a smooth *kasu-miso* mixture, stir it in to the soup pot.



Let the soup cook for another minute after the *kasu* and *miso* mixture has been added. Ladle out piping hot. Just before serving, sprinkle with the scallions.



KITCHEN NOTES... Most versions of *kasu-jiru* – and there are MANY – combine *saké kasu* with *miso* to balance salty and sweet flavors and to further fortify the nutrition of the chowder.



Any *aka* (“red”) or *shiro* (“white”) *miso* could be used though in the Tohoku either Sendai (dark) or *komé kōji*, (*aspergillus*, a health-promoting mold used as a “starter” to ferment many soy foods) infused *Nihonkai* (light) *miso* are favorites.

