



### SHAPING RICE “LOGS”

Most Japanese *obentō* (lunchboxes) include rice and often the rice is formed into easy-to-eat log-like shapes. These boxed meals are called *maku no uchi bentō* or "between the curtains meal." The name refers to the boxed meal that, in the old days, was taken to the theater and eaten between acts. Using special *kata*, or molds called *maku no uchi kata*, the rice is coaxed into bite-sized cylinders. The Japanese call this shape *tawara*, or rice bundle, because it looks like sheaves of freshly harvested rice bundled in the field. Most molds make 5 “logs” at one time; some make (slightly smaller) 7 “logs.” In addition, there are 3-log molds – these are a bit different to use and are detailed later in this document. Heavy-duty plastic (dishwasher-safe) and wood (hand-wash) molds are available for various shapes.



5-unit mold...



7-unit mold...

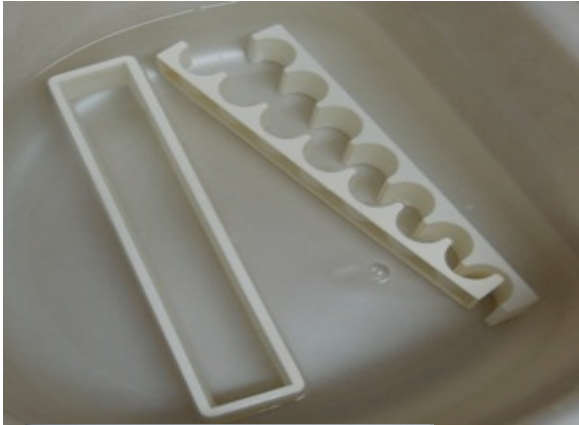


3-unit mold

Guideline for quantity:

**2 (generous) cups cooked rice** (made from 1 cup raw rice cooked with 1 cup + 2 tablespoons water), **makes about 20 “logs” using a 5-unit** mold OR **21 “logs” using a 7-unit** mold or **6 fat “logs” using a 3-unit** mold.

No matter what size or shape you wish to make the rice, It is best to shape the rice while it is warm – freshly cooked (and let rest for about 20 minutes), or briefly re-warmed (1 minute in a 600 watt microwave OR 2 minutes set over steam).



Separate the pieces of the mold you will use (all molds have 3 parts: top lid, bottom lid, frame).

Soak the pieces in water to cover; use a large bowl or small tub.

If you are using a 5 or 7-unit *maku no uchi* mold, the top and bottom pieces are identical (they can be used interchangeably) and the frame has no specified “top” or “bottom.”

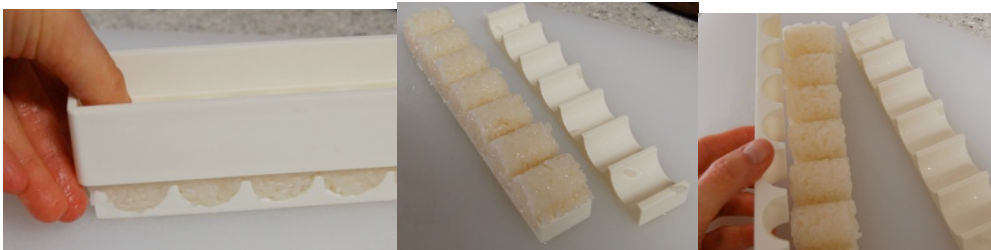


Lay the frame on your work surface (a clean, flat cutting board is easiest to use) and fit one of the lids into the frame so that pointed “mountains” face up and hollow “valleys” are down. With hands dipped in cold water, scoop up about 2/3 cup of cooked rice and fill the mold evenly with it.

Take the remaining strip of the mold and dampen it in cold water. Insert it, “mountains” pointing down into the frame.



Press down firmly but evenly on the top strip, while gently lifting the frame up, sliding it off the rice. Peel off the top strip, invert the rice, and then peel off the remaining strip of the rice mold. With fingers dampened in cold water, separate the logs of rice. Repeat, to make the amount needed.



Arrange the bundles in rows, or stack them pyramid-like hills. Use decorative green plastic leaves to help separate the rice bundles from each other. Cover with clear plastic wrap to prevent the edges from drying if you wish to make the rice bundles more than 20 minutes in advance of serving. The shaped rice will keep well at cool room temperature for 3-4 hours. For longer storage, lightly salt the rice before shaping.



**Using a 3-unit mold log mold...** As with the other molds, all pieces of the 3-log mold must be dampened before using (to be sure the molded rice will release from the gadget).



Unlike the 5-unit and 7-unit molds, the top and bottom lids of the 3-unit mold are not the same. One has a ridge (left), the other does not (right).

Place the frame on your work surface so that the notches are facing down. Set the ridged lid in to the frame and fill loosely with cooked rice. Place top lid (smooth, without a ridge) on top and press lightly.



Flip the entire set-up over so that the ridged lid is now on top. Press lightly on the lid as you lift up the frame. Remove the ridged lid; flip over and remove the final piece (smooth lid) to release 3 logs.



Wrap with *nori* bands or strips of thin omelette, if you like.

