

Tosa-Style Grilled Beef

Gyūniku no Tosa-Zukuri

牛肉の土佐造り



The waters of Tosa Bay off the Kōchi coast teem with bonito, which are harvested year-round to produce *katsuo bushi*, the dry-roasted fish flakes so important in traditional stock making. In the early summer months, though, fresh bonito is a delicacy. At that time, the fish are filleted, keeping the silvery skins intact. The fillets are then skewered and seared over intense heat to tenderize the skins yet keep the flesh rare and moist. A quick plunge in ice water stops the cooking process while forcing any oils or fats to solidify, facilitating their removal. The lean, rare fish fillets are patted dry and marinated in a heady combination of soy, ginger, garlic, and scallions, before being sliced and served chilled or at room temperature.

My Japanese sister-in-law, Yohko Yokoi, lived in suburban New Jersey for many years and during that time entertained her American neighbors frequently. Her summer barbecues attracted a large and hungry crowd, particularly when she served her beef version of the Tosa fish classic. For special occasions she prepared the dish using filet mignon, which is truly magnificent. In a more frugal mood, she made use of London broil, which when prepared the Japanese way becomes tender and tasty.

This dish is particularly well suited to those who grill outdoors often. After an informal cookout, the hot coals are just right for searing the beef. The marinade is quickly combined and the next day all you have to do is slice the meat.

Ingredients

- 1½ pounds beef, preferably filet mignon, though London broil is fine
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and cut into slivers
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- ice water

Marinade

- ½ cup soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons saké (Japanese rice wine)
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon ginger juice (extracted from freshly grated ginger)
- ½ cup honey
- 2 scallions, trimmed and finely minced (green and white parts), about ¼ cup

Garnish

- ¼ cup freshly **snipped chives**
- Other fresh herbs, optional

Dipping Sauce

- Juice of one lemon
- ¼ cup soy sauce

Choose a slender filet mignon or a piece of London broil that's no thicker than 1¼ inches. Make several shallow slits in all the surfaces of the meat and insert slivers of garlic into them. Brush the meat with a thin layer of oil, then salt and pepper both sides.

Sear the meat over hot coals or in a very hot preheated broiler. Turn it once after 5 minutes, or when well browned. Sear the other side of the meat, too. (If using a rounded filet, you may have to turn the meat at quarter turns to brown evenly.) The meat should be quite rare, though not raw, inside. You can judge the degree of doneness by lightly squeezing the meat with blunt tongs at the thickest section; the firmer the feel, the better done the meat is. Ideally, you'll encounter a bit of resistance at the surface, but feel the core to be more flexible. The internal temperature will be about 140 degrees.

Remove the meat from the grill and plunge it into a bowl of ice water. Gently lift the meat out of the water, leaving any fat behind. Pat the meat dry on several layers of paper toweling.

In a glass or ceramic container large enough to allow the grilled steak to lie flat in a single piece, combine the marinade ingredients. Stir well to distribute. Let the meat sit in the marinade, covered, at room temperature for 3 hours, or in the refrigerator overnight. If the marinade doesn't completely cover the steak, turn the meat several times to ensure even flavoring.

Serve chilled, or at room temperature. Just before serving, remove the meat from the marinade. Slice the steak across the grain into ¼-inch slices. Arrange these slices, domino style, on a large platter. Cover the top with snipped chives if you wish. Combine the lemon juice and soy sauce to make a dipping mixture, which is served separately.

NOTE: To cook indoors... Lightly oil a cast iron or other heavy-duty skillet. Sear the meat over high heat for 1 minute until the bottom is well browned and the top edges begin to turn color. Flip the meat and sear the other side for another minute. For medium-rare meat, cover and cook for another minute.

