

Soba noodles sold in Asian groceries and supermarkets are of two sorts:

dried *KAN MEN* 乾麺

semi-dried or “half-fresh” *HAN NAMA* 半生 noodles.

Dried soba can be stored as you would any other dried pasta or noodle (dry, cool, dark pantry is best) until the sell-by date listed on the package; semi-dried or half-fresh noodles should be kept as you found them at the store. If they were in the refrigerator or freezer section that is how you should continue to store them. If they were out on a cool, dry, dark shelf then you can also store them that way in your kitchen. Consume by the sell-by date.



(left: *hachi wari soba*... right: *jū wari soba*...

Most *soba* noodles are made from 80% *soba* (buckwheat) flour and 20% wheat flour; these are known as *hachi wari soba* (literally 80% *soba*). If you wish to make your noodle dish gluten-free you will need to buy *jū wari soba*, noodles made with 100% *soba* flour.

Read labels carefully.



From left: *yama imo soba*... *cha soba*... *han nama soba*

Because *soba* flour has no gluten, noodles made from it tend to crumble. Sometimes a binder of *yama imo* (sticky yam) flour is worked in to the dough to make it more elastic.

Some *soba* noodles will have flavorings added; the most frequently encountered is *cha soba*, made by mixing *soba* flour with *matcha* green tea (the kind of jade-colored tea used in the tea ceremony).

COOKING JAPANESE SOBA NOODLES

Cooking times for packaged Japanese soba noodles vary enormously according to the type, and from brand to brand. Look to see if instructions are provided; if so, follow the guidelines printed on the package. If no guidelines are available (or you are having trouble understanding the instructions), follow these basic procedures:

- **Use plenty of water... and a pot with lots of headroom** (for every bunch of dried noodles, typically 100 grams/ 3.5 ounces, use about 500 cc/1 pint of water and estimate at least 1-inch headroom. **DO NOT ADD** salt, or oil, to the water.
- Bring water in your pot to a rapid boil over high heat. **Scatter the noodles** and poke them occasionally (to keep from sticking together) until the water returns to a boil.
- **Begin counting from the time the water returns to a boil.** Adjust your heat source to maintain a steady, but less vigorous, boil. Cook for 5 minutes if no guideline is offered on the package.
- **TEST a noodle** by pulling it from the pot, plunging it in cold water and tasting. Ideally, noodles should be cooked through (no hard core) but still firm; similar to what Italians call *al dente*. If the noodle seems hard cook toss it back in the pot , Cook the noodles for another 1 minute before testing again. Repeat, as needed, at 1-minute intervals; dried soba noodles could require 7-8 minutes.
- When done, drain the noodles through a strainer set over a bowl to **SAVE THE COOKING WATER.**

The water in which soba noodles have been cooked is called **SOBA YU** そば湯. Many of the soba noodles nutrients -- protein, potassium and B complex vitamins -- are water-soluble and leech out of the noodles as they boil. The nutrient-rich *soba yu* is served **AFTER** the noodles have been eaten to make a broth from the remaining dip sauce. *Soba yu* is brought to table in a special pitcher called *yu tō* 湯桶.



- **RINSE** boiled noodles well under running cold water to remove any surface starch. Drain well. Transfer to individual serving plates or *zaru*.