

Tōmorokoshi Gohan 玉蜀黍ご飯 Corn-Studded Rice



Summertime... bushels of fresh, sweet, corn at every market and road stand begging to be taken home and transformed into *takikomi*-style **corn-studded rice**. If you have a busy week ahead, look at **Kitchen Notes** at the end of the recipe for suggestions on how to prep ahead. Consider doubling the recipe so you can make two weeknight meals from your seasonal bounty. The second time round corn-studded rice can be fashioned into *omusubi* rice bundles (these can be frozen and then toasted the following week), or become the bed for a curried stew, or maybe a slice of soy-glazed, skillet-seared fish.

Serves 4.

- 1 ear fresh corn, un-shucked (about 12 to 14 ounces will yield about 1 cup fresh kernels)
- 1 piece *kombu* (kelp), about 2 and 1/2 inches by 1-inch
- 2 cups cold water
- 1 and 1/2 cups Japanese-style short-grained rice
- 1 teaspoon light-colored soy sauce OR 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon *mirin* OR 1/2 teaspoon honey (or agave syrup)
- 2 tablespoons millet (*kibi*, *awa*, *hie*), optional

Strip the corn and make stock:

If you have road stand-fresh corn, prepare it as soon as you get back to your kitchen. If that's not practical, consult **Kitchen Notes** for ways to keep the corn juicy and sweet for several days.

Peel back the husks and remove them with the corn silk. These can be composted OR added to the stockpot later. With a sharp knife, slice off the corn kernels and set them aside. Place corncobs and *kombu* in a pot with the 2 cups water.

Bring to a boil over medium heat; adjust to maintain a steady but not especially vigorous simmer. Cook for 3-4 minutes – a pleasant sweet-corn aroma should waft from the pot.

If you like an assertively vegetal stock, add the stripped husks and corn silk and cook for another 2 minutes. Remove the pot from the stove and set a lid on it, slightly askew. Allow the stock to cool for 10-15 minutes; sweet corn flavors will intensify during this time.

Strain the stock into a measuring cup, adding water if necessary to make a scant 2 cups. This liquid will be used to cook the rice. If you will be making the corn-studded rice later in the week, refrigerate the stock in the interim and consult **Kitchen Notes**. The spent cobs that remain in the pot after making stock have little or no nutritive value and can be composted (or nibbled – my personal preference; they are yummy).

Wash the rice while waiting for your stock to cool.

Place the raw rice in a bowl and pour in cold water to cover. Swish and swirl the rice; the water will become very cloudy. This starchy water that is a by-product of rinsing raw rice is called *togi-jiru* (the verb *togu* means “to polish”). It has various uses from tenderizing vegetables to deodorizing hands and cooking pots. Details are in **Kitchen Notes**. Repeat several times until the rinse water appears clear. If starch remains on the surface of the rice it can inhibit flavor transfer. You want the opposite to happen: you want the rice to be infused with sweet corn flavor from the stock. So, rinse the rice well again, and drain well.

Adding millet.

If you can source various kinds of millet adding them to your rice will boost nutrition (calcium, iron, magnesium, fiber) and add textural interest (slightly chewy in contrast to the crisp corn and soft steamed rice). Other grains and/or cereals such as amaranth, quinoa, or barley could substitute for millet.

Cook the rice: Combine the washed, drained rice (and millet if you are adding it) with the corn-and-*kombu* stock in a straight-sided 3-quart pot, **OR** in the bowl of a thermostatically controlled rice cooker. With either method, season the stock with light-colored soy sauce and *mirin*; stir to mix. Add the corn kernels distributing them evenly over the surface of the rice. Do not stir them in. Place the spent *kombu* over the corn kernels. **If using an automated rice cooker (see Additional Kitchen Notes)**, press the start button. After the cooking cycle switches off, allow the corn and rice to sit, covered, for 10 minutes, before opening the lid.

If cooking your rice in a pot, stovetop: Cover the pot and place over high heat until the liquid begins to bubble, about 5 minutes. Adjust the heat to maintain a steady but not very vigorous boil and continue to cook, covered, until all the liquid has been absorbed,

about 5 minutes more. Remove from the stove and allow the corn and rice to sit, covered for about 10 minutes before opening the lid.

Serve the rice:

Remove and discard (or nibble!) the *kombu*. Using a *shamoji* (paddle-like spatula) with light cutting and scooping motions, fluff the rice and millet to distribute corn evenly. As you cut and fold, you will notice a crusty layer of rice on the bottom of the pot. When it is time to serve the rice, be sure that each portion includes some of this delicious *okogé*, literally “the honorable burnt bits.” Enjoy hot, or at room temperature.



The corn-and-rice can also be shaped into *omusubi* and served at room temperature, or toasted after being brushed with soy sauce.



KITCHEN NOTES: Planning ahead

Takikomi-style rice dishes are cooked in a flavorful stock extracted from the ingredient being featured (in this case, CORN). Truly a delicious way to enjoy seasonal bounty, but it typically takes more than an hour from start (stock-making) to finish (serving the flavor-packed, fully cooked rice). That’s not practical for a busy weeknight. Thankfully, there are several points at which the flow of activity can be temporarily suspended... and easily resumed.

FIRST... prepare stock ahead.

Delicate vegetable-based stocks do not freeze well, but can be stored in a glass (or other non-reactive) container successfully for several days, refrigerated. Our stock in this recipe is made from *kombu* (kelp), corncobs, husks and silk; corn kernels cut from the cob are set aside to cook with the rice later. If you will be making stock ahead, be sure to store the cut corn in a closed jar or re-sealable storage bag to keep them moist. Refrigerate if want to hold the cut corn more than a few hours.

NEXT... wash and drain rice; add stock.

Washing rice removes excess starch that otherwise creates a barrier to flavor transfer. Allow the rice to drain for at least 10 minutes before cooking; you’ll notice the translucent rice becomes opaque. Once it does, place the rice in your pot or bowl of your rice cooker and add stock.

THEN... cook. Using an appliance with a timer feature means you add stock to rice in the morning before leaving the house (and set the timer to finish cooking by 6:30 or 7 that evening). Or, if making *obentō*, set your rice cooker at night to have rice ready when you wake up the following morning.

KITCHEN NOTES: ... About TOGI-JIRU (starchy rice water)



Save *togi-jiru* (starchy rice water) in a glass jar (label the jar with the date and use within 5 days). After a day or two you will notice sediment forming at the bottom of the jar. Both the liquid and sediment has many uses; you can stir to recombine at any time. If the *togi-jiru* takes on a sour smell or turns pink DISCARD and clean the jar thoroughly.

The primary **CULINARY** use in the Japanese kitchen is to tender-prepare (par-boil) root vegetables such as *daikon* or *gobō*. But, if you will be eating your corn on-the-cob (rather than cutting the kernels off and cooking them with rice) use *togi-jiru* to briefly boil your shucked cobs of corn. Cooking fibrous vegetables in *togi-jiru* will make them tender-soft without falling apart; the natural oils in the rice water help them hold their shape. Parboiling also makes fibrous vegetables porous, getting them ready to absorb flavorful broth in the final stages of cooking.

Togi-jiru has numerous **NON-CULINARY** uses, including **COSMETIC** ones. *Togi-jiru* possesses MOISTURIZING (hand lotion, face cream, make-up foundation) and DEODORIZING powers. After chopping garlic or filleting fish, *togi-jiru* cream rubbed into your hands will neutralize unpleasant odors. It is also useful for de-odorizing pots after they have been used to make “aromatic” stews and sauces (such as curry). After washing your cooking pots in the ordinary manner, fill them with some of the thick *togi-jiru* sediment and enough water to reach halfway. Bring to a boil, adjust the heat to maintain a steady simmer and “cook” the starchy liquid for 5 minutes. Remove from the stove and allow the *togi-jiru* to cool naturally in the pot before rinsing it out.

Togi-jiru is also used to **TREAT CERAMIC WARE**, especially unglazed pottery. Place the pottery in a pot and fill with *togi-jiru*. Slowly bring the liquid to a simmer and “cook” for 1 or 2 minutes. Remove the pot from the stove and allow the dishes to cool naturally. With tongs and/or potholders carefully remove the dishes to an empty sink; pour in the cloudy *togi-jiru* to fill each. Let the pieces rest for at least 30 minutes and up to several hours. Rinse with warm water and let the dishes drip-dry. The starches in the *togi-jiru* help to seal the porous tableware making it more stain-resistant and less likely to absorb oil (from seared foods) as well.

Additional KITCHEN NOTES: Cooking Rice in an appliance



A thermostatically controlled rice cooker with timer and keep-warm features is a boon to the busy cook: it eliminates the need to constantly monitor the cooking progress and enables you to serve freshly cooked rice whenever you want. HOWEVER...when using such appliances you need to be mindful of the following:

- Do not fill the rice cooker to full capacity; leave some head room. When using a 4 or 5-cup sized rice cooker, prepare no more than 3 cups (raw, uncooked) rice.
- You **MUST USE** the same cup to measure rice and water.
- If using flavored stock instead of water to cook your rice, be sure the liquid is cool when you add it to the rice. If the stock is hot, or even very warm, your smart appliance will assume the rice is further along in the cooking process than it actually is.

Recipes here call for standard American cup measures for both rice and water. The measuring cup sold with rice cookers corresponds to the lines marked on the side of the bowl of that appliance. These are **very different** from standard American measurements. If you want to use the lines in the bowl of your cooker as a guide, you **MUST** use the cup that came with your appliance.

