

手打ちうどん *TÉ UCHI UDON* (Home-Stomped UDON Noodles)



Made from wheat flour and saltwater (average salinity 3.5%), *udon* noodle dough is dense and stiff, requiring tremendous strength to knead. Stomping power is far more effective, and certainly more fun, than using your hands to work the dough. *Tatami*--matted floors are ideal for stomping noodles, but linoleum-covered flooring works well, too. If your kitchen has a hard wood or flagstone floor, you will need to provide some cushioning. Try spreading a blanket or several bath towels on the floor before placing the noodle dough (in a plastic bag) on top. And, if foot stomping is not your style, you can use a mechanical kneading device such as a dough hook on a food processor, or a lasagna attachment to a pasta machine.

The amount of water needed can change quite dramatically depending upon the temperature and humidity. It is best to have extra brine on hand, using as little as possible to get the dough to hold together.

4 (generous) portions:

- 2 (American-sized) cups all-purpose flour, whole wheat if you prefer
- Brine: 1 tablespoon sea salt (1/2 that amount if using table salt) dissolved in 1/3 (American-sized) cup warm water
- Wheat flour for hands, rolling pin, and board (about 2-3 tablespoons)

To make fresh, homemade-style, noodles: Mix the dough by placing the flour in a bowl, and pouring in half the brine in a steady, slow stream around the outer edge rather than the center of the bowl. Gently incorporate flour from outer edges toward the center; stir to mix. Gradually drizzle in more of the brine, mixing until the dough forms a slightly crumbly mass. Exert a bit of pressure to form the dough into a ball and place it in a closed re-sealable storage bag to rest for about 30 – 45 minutes at room temperature. Or, if you prefer, the dough can be refrigerated overnight.

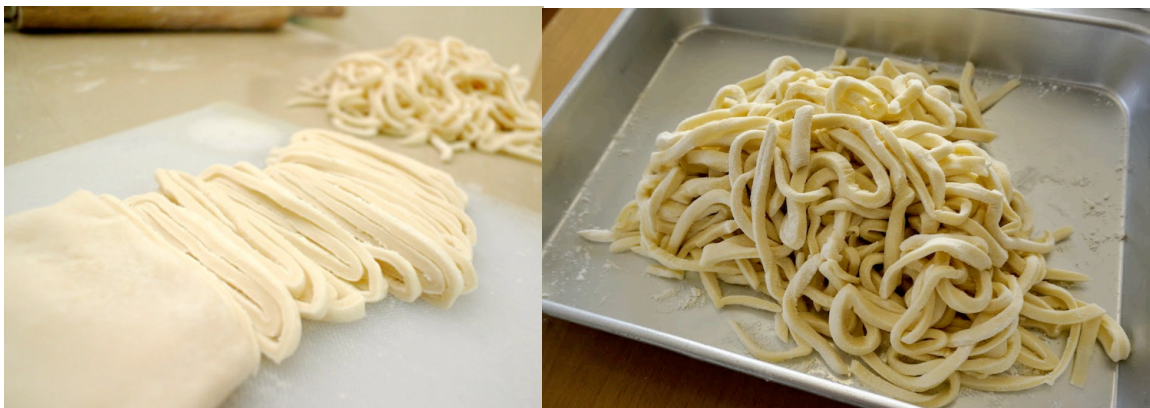




Most re-sealable storage bags do not hold up to stomping pressure well. It is best to sandwich the rested noodle dough between layers of heavy-duty plastic (a 6-foot plastic tarp, oilcloth or vinyl tablecloth, folded in half, works well). Place the tarp-enclosed dough on the table first and press on it with the heel of your hand to flatten. Place the bag on the floor and stand on top of it. Press down with both feet – putting slightly greater weight on your heels – and gradually turn in a circular fashion, using small, stomping steps. As your body weight is applied, the dough will flatten out and stretch. Stop occasionally to remove and fold the dough with your hands, then sandwich it again between the layers of plastic cloth and repeat your foot-pressing activity. Turn counter-clockwise occasionally to keep from getting dizzy. Sprinkle the dough with additional flour, as needed, to prevent the dough from sticking to the cloth.

After 4 or 5 minutes, when the dough feels elastic and has acquired a satiny sheen, do a final round of stomping to flatten the dough as evenly as possible. For best results, let the stomped noodle dough rest, covered with a damp (but well-wrung out) cloth for 30 to 40 minutes before rolling it out and slicing into ribbons (noodles).

Transfer the (rested) dough to a large, lightly floured board. Alternating vertical and horizontal strokes, use a lightly floured rolling pin to stretch the dough into a large oval or oblong shape, a bit thinner than 1/8-inch. If necessary, divide the dough in half and make two smaller ovals, each about 6 inches wide and 1-foot long.



Sprinkle the rolled-out dough liberally with flour, and fold it back on itself 4 or 5 times (like folding a paper fan, but do not crease or press the folded dough). Use a long, sharp knife to cut the dough into 1/8-inch-thick ribbons (each noodle is slightly flatter than it is wide). Lightly dust the noodles with flour before lifting them from the board. Cook immediately OR set aside, loosely covered, for up to 2 hours before cooking.

To cook fresh udon noodles: Bring a very large pot of water to a rolling boil. Gently shake off excess flour from the noodles before lowering them into the pot. Stir the noodles to be sure they separate into individual strands. **Cook at a steady boil for 4 or 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.** Test a noodle by pulling it out of the pot and plunging it in cold water: it should be translucent and firm, but with no hard core. The outer surface will be slippery but not overly soft. This condition is what the Japanese refer to as *koshi*, or “substance,” just as the Italians enjoy their pasta *a la dente*. If necessary, boil for another few minutes, checking progress every 45 seconds or so.



If you will be serving the noodles hot, lift them from the pot using either a pasta insert, or scoop a strainer or colander under the noodles. Reserve the boiling water to help re-heat the noodles, and warm the bowls. **If you will be serving the noodles cold,** drain them.

Whether you plan to serve the noodles hot or cold, rinse them well under running cold water to remove surface starch that would otherwise make the noodles gummy.

Set the noodles aside until ready to eat – they can be held for up to several hours (loosely cover and refrigerate if holding for more than 20 minutes). When ready to use, rinse noodles in boiling hot water if serving them in hot soup, or cold water if serving them chilled as a salad.

