



Tataki Gobō “Smashed” Burdock Root 叩き牛蒡

TATAKU, the verb that is the root of the word **tataki**, means to “smash.” This dish takes its rather alarming name from the thwacking sound emitted when fiber-rich foods, such as burdock root, are tenderized with a blunt, heavy tool. In the traditional Japanese kitchen, this would have been a *surikogi*, the wooden pestle used in conjunction with a ceramic *suribachi* (grooved mortar) to make the sesame sauce. In modern kitchens, in which food processors or *goma suri ki* (hand-powered grinding gadgets) crush the sesame, a rolling pin makes a fine substitute.

Many enjoy *tataki gobō* throughout the year. During the New Year holidays *tataki gobō* can be found among the assortment of special foods known as *osechi*. Folks in the Kansai region (Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe, Nara) are especially fond of *tataki gobō*.

Makes 4-6 portions

25-30 inches, about 10 ounces, *gobō*, (burdock root), preferably with soil still clinging to fairly slender roots

2 tablespoons vinegar

sauce:

1/3 cup *arai shiro goma* (unroasted, whole, white sesame seeds)

2 tablespoons *shōyu* (soy sauce)

1 and 1/2 teaspoons *mirin* (syrupy rice wine)

1 and 1/2 tablespoons Standard Sea Stock OR Kelp Alone Stock

Rinse the burdock root under running cold water, lightly scratching away soil with the back of your knife. Burdock root’s woody aroma is concentrated in its outer layers, so avoid heavy scraping that would remove too much of the peel while cleaning the root. Cut the cleaned roots into approximately 1 and 1/2-inch lengths, slicing thick pieces in half, or quarters, lengthwise. Soak the cleaned burdock root in plain cold water for 2-3 minutes (do not be alarmed to see the water turn brown) before draining.

In a 2-3 quart saucepan, bring several cups of fresh cold water, to which the vinegar has been added, to a boil. Blanch the burdock root for 2-3 minutes, or until a toothpick or bamboo skewer meets little resistance. Drain, but to retain full nutrients and flavor, do not refresh the burdock root under cold water.

To make the sauce, dry roast sesame seeds in a small, heavy skillet over medium-high heat. Stir the seeds occasionally with a wooden spatula or gently rotate the skillet in a circular motion. In about a minute, the sesame seeds will begin to color and a few pop (the warm air trapped between kernel and hull expands). The skillet retains heat so the sesame will continue to toast and deepen in color even after the skillet is taken away from the stove. Continue to stir the seeds for another 20 to 30 seconds or until they are a golden.



Transfer the roasted seeds to a *suribachi* and grind until cracked and aromatic, but not to a paste – ideally the final sauce will be the consistency of moist sand. If you do not have a *suribachi* and are using a food processor instead to crush the sesame seeds, be careful not to over process them.

Combine the soy sauce, *mirin* and stock. Add this mixture to the *suribachi* little by little while grinding to blend it in. If you are using a food processor, drizzle in the mixture through the tube on top, pulsing lightly to blend. If you have prepared the sauce in a food processor, scrape it into a bowl with a rubber spatula.

Lay drained, still-warm, burdock root on a clean, dry cutting board and, with the wooden pestle used to grind the sesame, or the back of your knife or a rolling pin, lightly pound to break the fibers slightly. As you do so, some of the excess moisture will also splash out (wear an apron to protect your clothes). This action is called *tataki* in Japanese and is the origin of the dish's name. Toss the smashed burdock root sticks in the sauce, coating them well. This dish can be made 2 or 3 days ahead and kept refrigerated, or on a cool shelf.

To serve, mound the sauced vegetable either teepee-style, or stacked in a small pyramid. Serve at room temperature

