

KURI no SHIBUKAWA NI
Sugar-Stewed Whole Chestnuts
(thin, inner skin remaining)

栗の渋皮煮



Chestnuts are delicious, but challenging to prepare. Nature has cloaked them in three layers of protection: the outer-most prickly burr (*iga*, in Japanese), a smooth, shiny and hard outer shell (*oni kawa*, literally “monster skin” in Japanese) and a thin, inner skin (*shibu kawa*, “astringent skin” in Japanese) that clings to the nuts.

毬・鬼皮・渋皮

iga • oni kawa • shibu kawa



The Japanese sugar-stew whole chestnuts in two ways, fully peeled and bright yellow (*kuri no kanro ni*; see the Pantry Notes at the end) and partially peeled keeping the burnished brown, slightly bitter *shibu kawa* intact.

This recipe is for the latter: glossy brown globes in sweet syrup tinged with soy sauce. *Shibu Kawa Ni* can be enjoyed with tea or coffee, served along side ice cream (vanilla bean is my choice, spooning some of the syrup over the ice cream) or used to make a variation on the classic chestnuts-and-rice dish known as *Kuri Gohan*.

300-500 grams (about 20-25) fresh whole chestnuts
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
150-250 grams sugar (3/4-1 and 1/4 cups)
1/2 teaspoon soy sauce

Peeling raw chestnuts is not easy but Japanese food blogs are filled with various tips – kitchen tricks and hacks – for achieving tasty, attractive results with (they claim) minimal fuss. After experimenting with various methods, I share with you what I find to be the most effective way even though it requires lots of elapsed time. I arrange my kitchen schedule to allow me to multi-task along the way.



- Soak the whole chestnuts, totally submerged in a pot of water for at least 30 minutes or, soak them overnight if that works better with your schedule.
- Place the pot over medium heat and bring the soaking nuts to a boil. Remove from the heat and allow the nuts to cool down in the pot until you can handle them comfortably (about 30-45 minutes).
- Using the tip of a sharp knife (or the tines of a small fork) pierce the hard outer shell (*oni kawa*) and start peeling it away carefully from the bottom to tapered top. You want to AVOID DAMAGING the inner *shibu kawa*.



- Once you have all your chestnuts peeled, place them in an enamel-lined (or other non-reactive) pot. Cover with fresh water and add the baking soda. Place this pot over medium heat and bring the water to a boil.
- The liquid will become very foamy and reddish-brown because of the *aku* (astringent elements) being drawn out of the nuts. Cook for about 30-40 minutes or until a toothpick meets little or no resistance.
- Move the pot to a deep sink and run water over the nuts in the pot until the frothy scum is gone and the water is clear (some of the scum will still cling to the pot – this can be washed away later).



- Check the *aku*-removed chestnuts for “strings” or other dark bits of outer shell that may still be caught in the crevices of the nuts. Use a toothpick to remove these as best you can – this will improve the texture and appearance of the final sugar-stewed chestnuts. If a few chestnuts begin to crumble in the process, SAVE THEM!



- The bits and pieces that might break loose when peeling should still be sugar-stewed along the prettier globes (the fragments make fabulous ice cream and sauces). Place the cleaned nuts in a non-reactive pot with fresh water to cover. Add the sugar and stir to distribute evenly.



Cut a circle of cooking parchment the same size as the diameter of your pot. Fold the circle in half, then again in half; snip the point to make a small vent hole in the center of the circle. Place this parchment over the nuts BEFORE placing the pot over medium heat.

Bring the liquid to a boil and adjust the heat to maintain a gentle simmer. Cook for 20 minutes, watching the consistency of the syrup as it reduces and thickens. Be careful not to let it scorch. When the liquid is the consistency of maple syrup, add the soy sauce, swirl or stir the pot to insure even distribution. Simmer for another 5 minutes (still covered by parchment).

Remove the pot from the stove and let the chestnuts cool – COVERED by the parchment – until no steam is visible. Carefully transfer the chestnuts with their syrup to small glass jars. When completely cool to the touch, seal, label and date your jars. Best to store in the refrigerator but a cool, dark pantry shelf is okay, too, before opening. The sugar-stewed chestnuts will keep for 3-4 months; once opened refrigerate and use the remainder within one week (that's why many small jars are a better choice than one large jar).

Pantry Notes: CHESTNUTS



甘露煮 • *kuri no kanro ni* Peeled Chestnuts in Sugar Syrup
 渋皮煮 • *shibu kawa ni* Sugar-Stewed Chestnuts (with inner skin intact)
 Baking Soda (bicarbonate of soda)
 焼ミョウバン • *yaki myōban* alum 重曹 • *jūso* bicarbonate of soda

WAYS TO ENJOY *Shibu Kawa Ni*



Making sugar-stewed chestnuts, *shibu kawa ni*, is admittedly, quite a bit of work. But well worth the effort when you consider how much eating pleasure there is to be had. And, if you properly prepare and seal the jars, the pleasure can span several months.

Whole globes can be enjoyed, as is, with tea or coffee. Chunks can stud pound cake or be spooned over ice cream (vanilla bean is my choice),



Be sure to sugar-stew the bits and pieces that break loose when peeling the chestnuts; cook these along with the prettier whole nuts. Mix the bits with vanilla or coffee ice cream to make a fabulous nutty ice cream. The whole nuts, and/or bits and pieces, can even be used to make a variation on the classic chestnuts-and-rice dish known as *Kuri Gohan*.