

お餅について

About OMOCHI

But first, a brief word about kinds of **RICE**;
URUCHI MAI & MOCHI-GOMÉ

糯米
(もち米)



粳米
(うるち米)



Rice that is consumed at most meals, “table rice,” is cooked from a grain known as **URUCHI MAI** (above, right). It is short-grained and appears somewhat translucent in its hulled but unwashed state. *Uruchi mai* is often sold outside Japan as “sushi rice” since that is the most common use for it in households that do not eat rice daily. That name is misleading, though: “sushi rice” is really *uruchi mai* table rice that has been cooked and then seasoned with a slightly sweet vinegar.

When **MOCHI-GOMÉ** (above, left) is sold outside Japan, it is labelled in various ways: “sticky rice” and “sweet rice” are most commonly seen, but sometimes packages are labelled with the word “glutinous.” Although that sounds similar to “gluten,” rice is completely gluten-free. Compared to oval-shaped, luminous *uruchi mai*, *mochi-gomé* grains are plump and chalky white in appearance.

When *uruchi mai* is washed it produces lots of cloudy run-off water called *TOGI-JIRU* that is quite starchy. When *mochi-gomé* is washed there is little or no starchy run-off.



There are many kinds of **omochi**:

◆ 丸餅 **MARU MOCHI**

◆ のし餅 **NOSHI MOCHI**

◆ 切り餅 **KIRI MOCHI**

◆ なまこ餅（海鼠餅） **NAMAKO MOCHI**

◆ 鏡餅 **KAGAMI MOCHI**



Steamed, pounded *mochi-gomé* rice is formed by hand into small, rounds called
丸餅 *MARU MOCHI*.



Pounded *mochi-gomé* is also rolled and stretched out to make sheets called
のし餅 *NOSHI MOCHI*.

These, in turn, are cut into squares or rectangles called
切り餅 *KIRI MOCHI*.

Note: Scissors (kitchen shears) are often more effective than a knife in cutting through the plastic-wrapped soft *nama mochi* (freshly pounded rice taffy). Once cut, dust each piece well with cornstarch or rice flour and store covered in a cool spot.



Freshly pounded *mochi-gomé* is also formed into loaves called

なまこ餅(海鼠餅) **NAMAKO MOCHI**

Why? Because the slightly domed loaves resemble *namako* sea cucumbers.

Pictured here are deep green *yomogi* (a delightful, health-promoting herb with the unfortunate name in English of “mugwort”), pale green *ao nori* (briny green sea herb), speckled *kuro mamé* (black soy beans) and orangey-pink *ichimi tōgarashi* (red chili pepper) flavored *namako mochi*. Such flavors are mixed with the soft freshly pounded *omochi* just before shaping the loaves.



鏡餅 **KAGAMI MOCHI Ceremonial Displays**



(Above) Discs of *omochi* are stacked and topped with citrus fruit (*daidai*, *mikan*, or *yuzu*) and fern-like *shiro* making the display look a bit like a snowman. Different parts of Japan have slightly different customs regarding the assembly and display of these ceremonial decorations. Pictured here are dried persimmons (*hoshi-gaki*) strung on a pole; dried scallops, squid and kelp are parts of many displays.



(Left) Huge (and heavy) *kagami mochi* discs become a weight-lifting contest at Kyoto's Daigo-Ji temple. Here 90 kilos/198 pounds!!!



MOCHI TSUKI... steamed *mochi-gomé* rice is pounded into a sticky, taffy-like mass. In mid-December, many communities throughout Japan organize rice-pounding events called **MOCHI-TSUKI TAI KAI**. Unfortunately this year, because of the Corona virus, events have been cancelled.

Traditional wisdom has it that *mochi tsuki* activities should not take place on the 29th of December. Why? Because the word for number “9” is *ku* which sounds like the word for “trouble” and “hardship” that is also pronounced *ku*. The word *mochi* means both “rice taffy” and the verb “to have.” So... If you pound rice to taffy on the 29th, you will “have trouble” in the year to come. Something to be avoided!

Below, a woodblock print by Utagawa Kunisada (1786-1865 AD) Utagawa Kunisada, also known as Utagawa Toyokuni III, a very popular and prolific *ukiyo-e* woodblock artist in 19th-century Japan. This scene is titled *Shiwasu no Mochi Tsuki* (Hectic-December Rice-Pounding)

師走の餅搗き



TIPS for BUYING & STORING OMOCHI

お餅を買う・保存する

If you can source freshly made (*nama*) *omochi* you are in for a treat.



If you have sourced soft *nama mochi* (freshly pounded rice taffy) sheets cut them right away into small pieces about 1x2-inches. Cut loaves of *namako mochi* into 1/4-inch thick slices.

Nama mochi turns rock hard within several hours of being exposed to air. Most commercially made *noshi mochi* is sold wrapped in a clear plastic cover (to keep it from drying out and cracking) that has cutting guidelines printed on it.

Scissors (kitchen shears) are often more effective than a knife in cutting through the plastic-wrapped soft *omochi*. Once cut, remove the plastic wrap and dust each piece lightly with cornstarch or rice flour. Store the cut pieces covered in a cool spot.

Omochi can develop mold and if you are allergic to penicillin (or its equivalent) it is best to throw the *omochi* out.

If you do not have such allergies, Japanese Granny-wisdom claims no harm will be done by cutting away the moldy spots. Indeed, in the old days, *ao kabi* was cultivated for its medicinal properties, placing it on open wounds to avoid infection.

