

## An Illustrated GUIDE to (vegetarian & vegan) ODEN Items

Various ingredients find their way into pots of *oden*; regional preferences are evident when you travel around Japan. This GUIDE includes commonly encountered items that puzzle those not brought up with Japanese kitchen culture. The VEGAN items fall into 4 categories:

- #1 *tōfu* and soy-foods (豆腐類 • *daizu seihin* 大豆製品)
- #2 root vegetables (*konsai rui* 根菜類)
- #3 *konnyaku* (蒟蒻)
- #4 other (*sono ta* その他)

Products made from **soy beans** are collectively known as *daizu seihin* 大豆製品... *tōfu* in many forms.



茶巾 [**chakin**] pouches of fried *tōfu* can be stuffed with *omochi* [slabs of pounded sticky rice] and/or other ingredients such as mushrooms and/or *shirataki* noodles.

茶巾 [**chakin**] pouches of fried *tōfu* can be tied with edible *kampyō* gourd ribbons, or threaded closed with toothpicks.



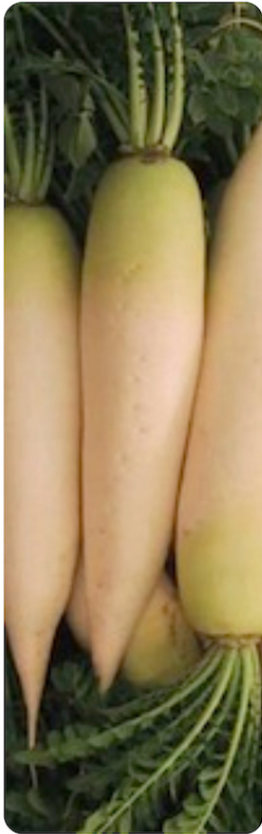
厚揚げ [**atsu agé**] thick fried *tōfu*



焼き豆腐 [**yaki-dofu**] grilled or broiled blocks of firm *momen-dōfu*

がんもどき・ガンモ  
[**ganmodoki** or **ganmo**] Vegan dumplings made from *tōfu* and minced vegetables bound with grated *yama imo* yam.





**The most commonly encountered root vegetables (*KONSAI RUI*)**

根菜類 include: *daikon*, *renkon* (lotus root), *gobō* (burdock root), and carrots. In addition, tubers such as *sato imo* and *jygaimo* potatoes are often added.

Wheels or chunks of *daikon* and/or and carrots that are especially soft will have been par-boiled in *togi-jiru* (water left after washing rice) before being added to the *dashi* stock in the pot. Doing so preserves nutrients and flavor (the starchy rice water seals in these elements) while tenderizing otherwise dense and hard vegetables.

Starchy rice water (*togi-jiru* – run-off from washing rice) seals in nutrients while tenderizing otherwise dense and hard vegetables.



### #3 other KONNYAKU 蒟蒻 (コンニャク)

The *konnyaku* tuber is pictured below: top row, left.

黒蒟蒻 black-speckled *kuro konnyaku* (sliced; cross-hatched)

手綱蒟蒻 *konnyaku* twist *tazuna konnyaku*

糸こん *konnyaku* threads *ito kon* also called

白滝 (しらたき) “white waterfall” mass of tangled white threads *shirataki*

結び蒟蒻 knotted bundle of threads *musubi konnyaku*



*Konnyaku* is sold as a gelatinous loaf in varying sizes; it also comes in noodle-like threads called *shirataki* (literally “white waterfall”), or when bundled and tied it is called *ito kon* (“thread” *konnyaku*) or *musubi* (“bundled”) *konnyaku*. Both the loaf and the noodles are processed from a tuber called *konnyaku imo* that is rich in dietary fiber and low in calories, with no real taste of its own. *Konnyaku* is inexpensive and absorbs the flavor of foods with which it is cooked; it is often added to stewed or simmered dishes by dieters and those with tight household budgets to create extra, low-calorie volume.

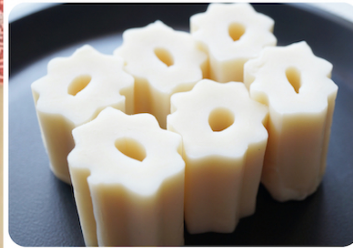
The speckled varieties of *konnyaku* and *shirataki* have *hijiki*, a calcium-rich sea vegetable, added for texture and nutrition. For those using *konnyaku* products for the first time, be reassured that the (frankly funky and rather unpleasant) smell on opening the package is entirely normal. It is not a sign of spoilage. If you will not be using the entire package, pour off the liquid and transfer the remaining loaf or noodles to a lidded container filled with fresh cold water. Refrigerate for up to 5 days, changing the water daily. Drain before using. You will notice a chalky residue develop on the inside of whatever container you use to store your *konnyaku* products. This is a natural mineral build-up from the lime (calcium oxide) used to solidify the *konnyaku* tuber gel. It is a nuisance to remove but not a cause for concern. I suggest you dedicate a container for storing *konnyaku* and then just rinse it and let it drip-dry (sediment intact).

## #4 other items

left, vertical + right, center  
 竹輪麩 wheat dough  
 sausage  
 [chikuwa-bu]



right, top  
 結び昆布 kelp knots  
 [musubi kombu]



right, bottom  
 ゆで卵 boiled eggs  
 [yudé tamago]



Boil eggs to medium to be sure the eggs can be easily peeled. Peel and place whole in your oden broth to simmer with other ingredients.



To prepare the *chikuwa-bu* remove from package and cut into segments (diagonal or straight across) to make (about 1-inch/2.5 cm length) cylinders. Place pieces in a pot lined with a piece of *kombu* and just enough water to cover the pieces of *chikuwa-bu*. Let sit for 10 minutes before placing over low heat and slowly bringing to a boil. Adjust the heat and simmer for 2-3 minutes. Transfer the *chikuwa-bu* to your *oden* pot with other ingredients; the *kombu* can also be added to line the *oden* pot (it can be nibbled at the end).



The kelp knots can be fashioned from *kombu* left-over from making dashi OR from *nama kombu* ("fresh" kombu) sold in the refrigerated section of many Asian grocery stores. Most packages of *nama kombu* contain *kombu* that has been heavily salted (the old-fashioned way to preserve the "freshness"). Rinse several times and drain. Make knots, cutting segments AFTER you have knotted the full length. When simmered in *oden* the bright green color will fade a bit.