



VEGAN & VEGETARIAN ODEN BASIC RECIPE

Assumes 6 to 8 people will share from the same pot of ODEN

Plan on at least 5 items for a single portion. Choose one or more items from among the following categories:

tōfu and soy-foods

root vegetables

konnyaku

other such as kelp knots, wheat “sausages” (*chikuwa-bu*), boiled eggs

VEGAN ODEN BROTH:

6-8 cups **KELP ALONE** (recipe page 3)

OR

6-8 cups **SANKAI** (kelp & mushroom) **Dashi** stock (recipe pages 4-5)

Seasonings Tokyo/Kanto-Style:

- 1 tablespoon *saké*
- 2 tablespoons *mirin* (syrupy rice wine)
- 1 teaspoon *usukuchi shōyu* (light-colored soy sauce)
- 1 tablespoon *shōyu* (soy sauce)

OR

Seasonings Osaka/Kansai-Style:

- 2 tablespoons *saké*
- 1 and 1/2 tablespoons sugar
- 3 tablespoons *shōyu* (regular soy sauce)

There are no absolute “rules” governing the inclusion of ingredients in an *oden* pot. Aim for variety: at least 5 different items to include in your pot, preferably 7 or 8 (or more). To achieve nutritional balance and aesthetic harmony, consider color, texture, nutrition, shape and size of the various ingredients. A single serving should include at least 3 pieces of protein and 2 or 3 vitamin and/or mineral-rich ingredients.

Here are some suggestions for planning a meal with *oden* as your featured dish (the “main course” of your meal). At street stalls and in pubs, *oden* is most often nibbled while quaffing beer or sipping *saké*. In the home, plain rice is often served on the side, with an assortment of pickled vegetables.

Protein-packed items:

Many varieties of **tōfu** are commonly used in *oden*. Some are FRIED such as *atsu agé* (thick fried *tōfu*) or *chakin* pouches (fried *tōfu* slices that are stuffed with *omochi* (pounded sticky rice) and *ganmodoki* or *ganmo* (vegan dumplings made from *tōfu* and minced vegetables bound with grated *yama imo yam*). *Tōfu* can also be grilled or broiled, known as *yaki-dōfu*. OTHER protein-rich items include **chikuwa bu** (wheat dough “sausage”) and **boiled eggs**.

Vitamin/mineral-rich items (vegetables):

Wheels or chunks of *daikon* and/or carrots, burdock root, potatoes, and lotus root provide nutrition and flavor.

Parboil the root vegetables in starchy rice water (*togi-jiru*; pictured in a jar below left) to cover; use an *otoshi-buta* (wooden dropped lid) or cooking parchment cut in a circle to cover the vegetables. Cook for about 10 minutes, or until barely tender – a bamboo skewer or toothpick should meet little resistance. If need be, continue to simmer those pieces that are not yet tender. Drain and quickly rinse away any starchy residue clinging to the vegetables. If your sink has a shower spray attachment, use that. If not, have a bowl of cold water ready and briefly dip each piece in the water while rubbing gently with your fingers. Avoid extended soaking; it will waterlog the vegetables, robbing them of flavor and nutrients.



KONNYAKU comes in a variety of shapes and sizes including *ito kon* threads *musubi konnyaku* knotted bundles of threads and *shirataki* literally “white waterfall,” a tangle of white *konnyaku* threads.

Fill your pot...



There are special *oden nabé* pots (left) that have dividers with holes that allow the simmering liquid to move freely from one section to the other.

Place your items in a shallow, wide pot, clustering similar items and making sure that the pot is packed snugly. Pour in enough seasoned *dashi* (either Kelp Alone or Sankai Dashi) to barely cover the items in your pot. Place the pot over low heat and simmer over medium-low heat for at least 15 minutes and preferably 30 minutes or more. Throughout, check levels of liquid to prevent scorching. If need be, add more Kelp Alone stock.

Allow the contents of the pot to cool down to room temperature (it is during this stage of cooking that the broth is absorbed into the simmered items). This can be done 10-12 hours ahead and left at cool room temperature. Just before serving, re-heat slowly until barely simmering. Serve with *karashi* mustard (powder mixed with water, or from a tube of paste).



KELP ALONE STOCK (4 varieties of kelp)



ma kombu

Rausu kombu

Rishiri kombu

Hidaka kombu

Soak *kombu* in water for at least 20 minutes (and up to 12 hours). Any variety of *kombu* is fine but a combination of types will produce a richer, more complex flavor. The list shows highest glutamate level *kombu* on top, lowest on bottom. The jar can be kept at room temperature unless it is a very hot day, in which case I recommend you place it in the refrigerator and allow at least 2 hours to draw out flavor. After extracting flavor, the stock can be kept refrigerated for up to 4 days. The cold-water infusion is packed with flavor.

SANKAI DASHI... Ichiban & Niban Stocks

(Primary & Secondary Mushroom & Kelp Stock)

SAN “mountain” 山 + **KAI** “sea” = 山海



Sourcing foods from oceans and streams... and combining them in the same dish with food harvested from the land is an underlying theme of the Japanese kitchen. Expressed as *UMI no SACHI*, *YAMA no SACHI* (the Bounty of the Seas, the Bounty of the Mountains) this notion honors ecologically sound farming practices while producing deeply flavorful food. *Sankai Dashi* made from dried *shiitaké* mushrooms (sourced from the land) and *kombu* (from the sea) combines woody and briny overtones. This combination produces two kinds of stock:

- ◆ Cold-water infusion/stock or ICHIBAN Sankai Dashi
 - ◆ Slowly simmered broth/stock or NIBAN Sankai Dashi
- Either or both can be used to make soups, stews and sauces.

To make a liter/generous quart of ICHIBAN Sankai Stock:

Break off stems from 3 or 4 dried *shiitaké* mushrooms and set aside the caps for use in other recipes. Place the mushroom stems (and any broken bits of caps) with a 2-inch long piece of kelp in a 2-quart (or liter) glass jar. Cover with 5 cups tap water. Soak the *shiitaké* stems and *kombu* in the water for at least 30 minutes (and up to 12 hours). Strain the liquid through cloth or paper (to remove any gritty material or sediment) as

you transfer it to another glass jar. This strained liquid is your kelp-enriched ICHIBAN mushroom stock. Refrigerate (for up to 3 days) if you will not be using it right away. I do not recommend freezing; the woody-briny flavors will turn bitter.

Use any variety of *kombu* you wish, but using a combination of types will yield a more complexly flavored stock. The list above shows 4 varieties of kelp with MA KOMBU (top) having the highest concentrate of *umami seibun* (flavor-enhancing glutamate), and HIDAKA KOMBU (bottom) the mildest.

To make a liter/generous quart of NIBAN Sankai Stock:

Place *ichiban dashi* in a pot on your stove and s-l-o-w-l-y bring the liquid to barely a simmer. Small bubbles beginning to migrate to the surface of your pot indicates you've reached the best temperature for extracting deliciousness (*umami seibun* glutamates) but not activating bitter tannins. Continue to gently simmer for about 10 minutes, skimming the surface to remove any "froth" that might appear.



Strain the liquid through cloth or paper (to remove any possibly remaining gritty material or sediment) as you transfer it to non-reactive container. This strained liquid is your deeply-hued and richly flavored NIBAN mushroom stock.

Refrigerate (for up to 4 days) if you will not be using it right away. I do not recommend freezing; the woody-briny flavors will turn bitter.

SUGGESTION: If a recipe calls for dried *shiitaké* mushroom caps to be softened, begin by snapping off the stems and setting them aside for use in making stocks another time; the caps alone will provide ample flavor to the dish you are making at that time, and the stems can contribute to other dishes in the future. Conversely, if the dish needs only mushroom stock and not the caps, use stems or broken bits for flavor and save the caps for another time.



2 varieties of dried *shiitaké* are generally available in Asian grocery stores: thick, mottled *donko* (left) and *kōshin* (right). The former are usually more costly and boast a meatier flavor.