

小松菜と油揚げの煮浸し *Komatsuna to Abura Agé no Ni-Bitashi*
Simmered-and-Steeped Leafy Greens with Fried *Tōfu*



A member of the brassica family of leafy greens, ***komatsuna*** has been cultivated in Japan since the Edo period (1603-1868). The naming of the vegetable is attributed to Shogun, Tokugawa Yoshimune who so enjoyed a soup featuring the local leafy green during a visit to a shrine near the Komatsu River (modern day Shin-Koiwa, Chiba), that he officially named the vegetable “the leafy green of Komatsu.”

Ni-Bitashi, literally “simmer-and-steep,” is a two-stage cooking method that BEGINS with blanching and STEEPING (this is the *hitashi* or *bitashi* part) and then GOES ON to SIMMER (the *ni* part). During the first stage, *komatsuna* is briefly blanched, then placed in lightly seasoned *dashi* stock to cool. As the greens cool they become infused with the flavor of the *dashi*.

This dish can be prepared through stage one and held there (in the refrigerator) for several days. When ready to serve go on to stage two: briefly simmer the steeped greens with strips of fried *tōfu* and slivers of carrot. It is best served at room temperature (rather than piping hot). Any left-overs will keep for several days, refrigerated.

Makes 6 servings.

- 1 bunch *komatsuna* leafy greens, about 8 ounces/225 grams
- 1 -2 slices *abura agé* (thin sheets fried *tōfu*)
- 1 and 1/2-inch/5-cm piece carrot
- 1 and 1/2 cups (400 cc) *dashi* stock (either Standard Sea Stock or Kelp Alone Stock)
- 1 tablespoon *mirin* (sweet *saké*)
- 1 and 1/2 tablespoons *usukuchi shōyu*

Prepare your *komatsuna ohitashi*-style: Begin by washing your leafy greens. Slit roots and rinse. Tie in bundles with kitchen twine keeping slit roots aligned.





Blanch greens, root-ends first (until just wilted), then invert and cook leafy tops just until they also wilt. Lift blanched greens from pot (save this water to blanch fried *tōfu* later) and refresh the greens BRIEFLY in cold water; squeeze out excess moisture.

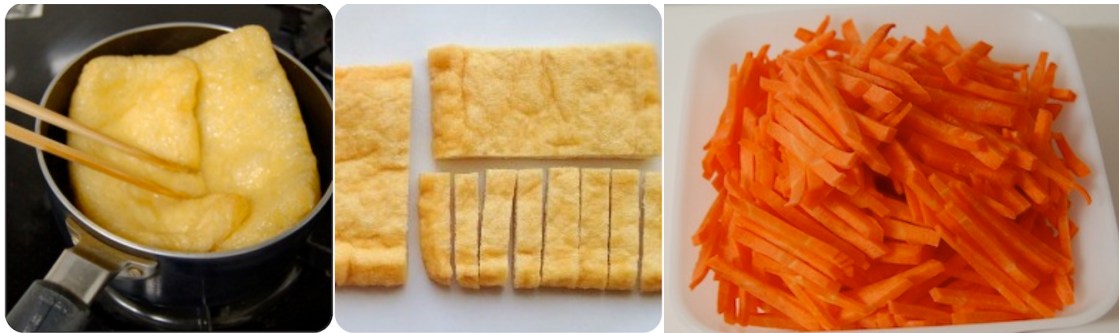


Transfer the blanched greens to a non-reactive container; remove strings.

Season the *dashi* with the *mirin* and *usukuchi shōyu*. Steep the *komatsuna* in the seasoned *dashi* keeping the greens aligned.

Bring the pot of water you used for blanching the greens back to a rolling boil.

Blanch the fried *tōfu* to remove excess oil. Drain, squeeze and blot before cutting the fried *tōfu* into narrow strips. Peel or scrape the carrot and cut into matchsticks.



Remove the blanched *komatsuna* from its steeping liquid and cut it into 1 and 1/2-inch (5 cm) lengths. Pour the steeping liquid into a 7-inch/18 cm skillet and bring to a simmer.



Add the fried *tōfu* and carrots to the skillet and simmer for one minute. It is best to use an *otoshi-buta* (dropped lid) to keep the food submerged in the shallow liquid (you can fashion a similar tool from cooking parchment). Simmer for 2 minutes before adding the stem sections of the *komatsuna*. Simmer for one minute, add the remaining sections of *komatsuna* and remove from the stove. It is in this cooling down stage that flavor from the simmering liquid is drawn into the food,



Serve the dish at room temperature (rather than piping hot). Any leftovers will keep for several days, refrigerated. Briefly reheat or bring back to room temperature before serving.

