TURNIP QUICK-PICKLE with SAKURA SALT

蕪の桜塩即席漬け

Commercially prepared salt-cured *sakura* cherry blossoms are sold in sealed bags or jars. Before using them place the salted flowers in a fine-meshed strainer set over a bowl. Tap the strainer to shake off excess salt. If the blossoms seem thickly crusted with salt, you can use gentle rubbing motions to help remove the excess.

Store the aromatic excess salt in a small sealed glass jar or wrap in parchment (fold to make a packet) and then into a separate jar. OR wrap flat packets in foil and store in the freezer to better preserve the salt's cherry-like aroma.

This turnip quick-pickle can be made one of three ways:
(1) Cherry-infused brine (from briefly dipping salt-encrusted flowers in water)
(2) Just the flowers (after tapping off excess salt and setting it aside for other uses)
(3) Just some of the excess salt (saving the flowers for other uses)

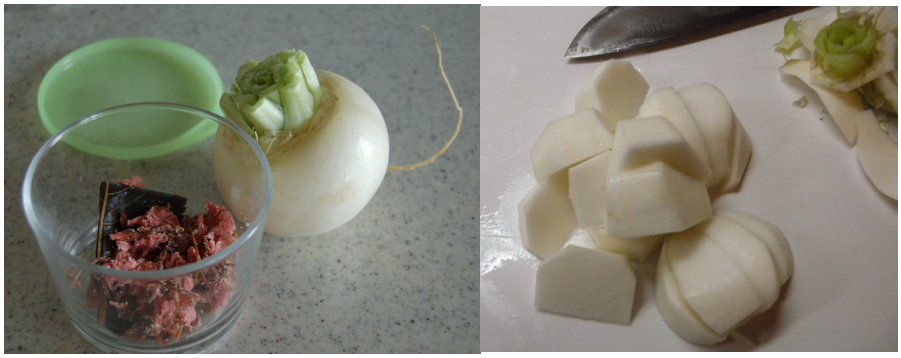
INGREDIENTS (Makes about 2 cups quick-pickles):

2-3 small white Japanese turnips (*ko kabu*), preferably with leaves attached, each globe about 2 inches (5 cm) wide and weighing about 6 ounces (170 grams)

2-3 clusters of salt-encrusted *sakura*, each with 4-5 blossoms (total of 15-20 blossoms) OR 1 teaspoon cherry-infused salt

1-inch strip of *kombu* (kelp) cur into thin slivers

Trim, peel and cut turnips into slices or wedges. The thinner the pieces, the quicker the turnip will pickle. But sliced too thin, the pickle will be deprived of crunchy texture. Tufts and/or leaves can be included in the pickle if you wish. Adding kelp will cause the brine, vegetables and kelp to become slightly sticky. This is a good sign – evidence that the natural glutamates in the kelp are doing their flavor-enhancing work.



(1) Use (cherry-infused) **BRINE METHOD**:

After tapping off excess salt from the flowers and setting it aside for other uses (see introductory text), **quickly dip** several clusters of salted cherry blossoms (about 20-30 blossoms in all) in one cup of cool water. To preserve the delicate floral aroma do not use warm water and do not soak the flowers.

Place your sliced turnips in a non-reactive container (glass bowl or loaf pan) or in an even layer at the bottom of a pickle press. Add a few slivers of *kombu* and pour brine over all to cover. Apply pressure for at least 6-8 hours and up to 24 hours.

(2) Use the WHOLE FLOWER METHOD:

After tapping off excess salt from the flowers and setting it aside for other uses (see introductory text), place the flowers in a re-sealable bag with the sliced turnips. Lightly massage until moisture is drawn out from the turnips. Add strips of *kombu* and massage a bit further.

Place the bag in a bowl (or the bottom of a pickle press) and apply weight equal to the weight of the turnips.

Water in a jar (2 American cups water = 480 grams or about 1 pound) or any heavy objects (such as 12-16 ounce can) can be used.

Apply pressure for at least 2-3 hours and up to 8 hours.

3) Use EXCESS SALT METHOD:

Place sliced turnips in a bowl or re-sealable bag. Add the cherry-infused salt you tapped off from flowers.

Once you observe moisture has been drawn out from the turnips, add strips of *kombu* and toss and/or massage.

Apply weight equal to the weight of the turnips. Keep this pressure in place for at least 2-3 hours and up to 8 hours.

When ready to serve, gently squeeze and mound.

KITCHEN NOTES

Some varieties of *aka kabu* (red turnips) are quite pale in color.

They will produce a pale pink quick pickle.

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It is a (naturally occurring) chemical compound called **coumarin** that accounts for the distinctive sweet cherry aroma. Consumed in large quantities coumarin can be mildly toxic to humans, though many practitioners of *kampōyaku*, Japan's herbal medicine, make use of coumarin's anticoagulant properties in a positive way.