

麴漬け鶏肉の酒蒸し *Kōji-zuké Toriniku no Saka Mushi*

KŌJI-POACHED CHICKEN



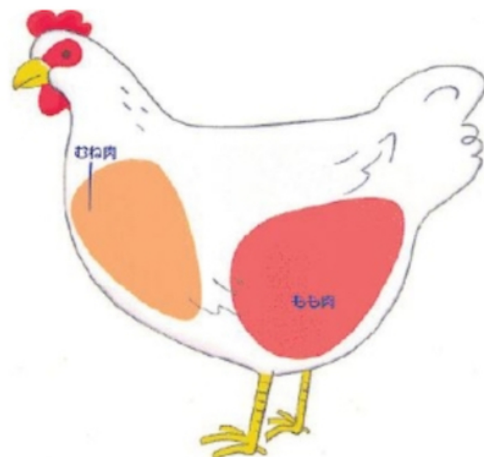
The Japanese cooking technique known as *SAKA MUSHI* literally “*saké* steamed” is the equivalent of poaching. The technique is most often used to cook fish, shellfish or chicken; it keeps the food moist as it gently cooks in a limited amount of *saké* and broth. Here chicken breasts, or thighs, are briefly, lightly massaged in *komé kōji* (malted rice) first; this softens otherwise tough muscle tissue and sinews. And, it makes the chicken less “gamey” tasting, too.

Making this dish can be worked into even the busiest of schedules. Massage and marinate the chicken in the refrigerator in the morning and finish by poaching in a shallow pan in the evening. Once the chicken has been prepared and cooked it will keep in the refrigerator for 2-3 days. The poached meat can be sliced and served with various sauces or condiments. Or shred and add to salads, or use to top noodles. It makes great sandwich meat, too.

I urge you to leave the skin on while marinating and poaching the chicken to keep the meat moist and flavorful. You can remove it later if you prefer not to eat it.

Boneless breast
meat with skin
(upper right)

Boneless thigh
meat skin side
down (bottom
right)



Makes enough chicken to top 4 noodle dishes or salads.

- 1 large boneless breast OR thigh with skin attached (about 12 oz/340 grams)
- 1 teaspoon *komé kōji* (malted rice)
- 1 strip *kombu* (kelp) soaked in 1 and 1/2 cups water for 20 minutes or longer
- 2 tablespoons *saké*

With the tines of a fork, poke through the skin of the chicken breast – this will permit the flavor-enhancing and tenderizing properties of the *kōji* to work more efficiently. Place the chicken in a resealable bag with the *komé kōji* (malted rice) and massage lightly to distribute well. Marinate for 20-30 minutes at cool room temperature, or refrigerate for several hours.



If you prefer, you can *kōji*-massage the chicken and then freeze it for up to one month. You can place the frozen *kōji*-marinated chicken in a shallow pan with the kelp broth and gently poach – no need to defrost first.



Poach the marinated chicken: place the kelp with the water it has been soaking in, in a skillet or shallow pan – one in which the chicken will fit fairly snugly. Arrange the chicken over the kelp, add the *saké* and slowly bring to barely a simmer (a few bubbles at the rim). Cover with parchment (and an *otoshi-buta* dropped lid, for more fuel-efficient cooking). Simmer over low heat for 5 minutes. Remove from the stove and let the chicken cool to room temperature naturally, covered throughout.

Pour off the liquid; strain it and use as stock.

If you prefer to eat your chicken skinless, now is the time to remove it.

Enjoy the chicken at room temperature, or well chilled. Refrigerate the entire piece of chicken at this point (and slice or shred later), or slice or shred now and store ready-to-use.



PANTRY NOTES:

About **SHIO KŌJI**. “Shio” means SALT while “*kōji*” is ***Aspergillus oryzae*** -- a good mold containing enzymes that break down the starches and proteins in food into sugars and amino acids. That makes those foods treated with *kōji* tender and flavorful.

Shio kōji is the starter for many of Japan’s fermented products (such as *saké*, *miso*, soy sauce). It is a live and active organism (like yoghurt) and is usually kept in the refrigerator case at an Asian grocery. Cool room temperatures are usually fine – *kōji* has been part of the Japanese pantry for more than a thousand of years, long before modern refrigeration!



In America, the two most readily available brands are Cold Mountain (upper left & right) and Marukome (lower left).

Both brands offer textured (granular) and smooth (creamy) types.

In Japan, I prefer grainy-textured Echigo Koji Toko (bottom, right).

The word KŌJI in Japanese can be written three different ways; each displays a slightly different nuance.

糀 *kōji*

The calligraphy has 2 parts: *komé* (“rice”) on the left and *hana* (“flower”) on the right. When rice or barley (*mugi*) is steamed and inoculated with *kōji kin* bacillus the grain looks like white fluffy flowers that have bloomed on its surface.

麹 *kōji*

The calligraphy has 2 parts: *mugi* (“barley”) on the left and *komé* (“rice”) enclosed in a bracket on the right. Rice or barley (*mugi*) is steamed and inoculated with *kōji kin* bacillus to become the starter for many fermented products including *mugi miso* and *saké*.

こうじ
kōji

Written in *hiragana* (syllabary system) usually refers to the *tané* or “seed” that initiates the fermentation process.