

Kabocha, a pumpkin-like squash with sweet, orangey-gold flesh and dark green, edible skin, frequently appears on the menu in Japan. The classic way to prepare *kabocha* is to simmer it in a slightly sweet soy-tinged stock. This recipe takes the process one step further, adding flash-blanching okra to the *kabocha*.



Soy-Simmered Kabocha with Flash-Blanched Okra

Makes 4-6 servings.

1/2 *kabocha* (pumpkin squash), about 1 pound (450 grams)
1 cup *Dashi* stock (see **KITCHEN NOTES** pg 3)
1 tablespoon *saké*
2 teaspoons sugar
1 to 1 and 1/4 tablespoons soy sauce

8-12 pods okra
1 teaspoon salt (for rubbing okra)
1/2 cup *Dashi* stock

Soy-simmer the *kabocha*:

Wash the *kabocha* skin and pat dry. Scoop out seeds and cut into 12 pieces. To keep the vegetable from crumbling as it cooks, bevel the edges of each piece. Use a vegetable peeler or a knife to trim off a narrow strip of peel at the edge.



Arrange the pieces skin-side down in a pot, in a single layer. Add enough stock to barely cover the *kabocha*, about 1 cup. Place an *otoshi-buta* (dropped lid) over the *kabocha* OR cover the pieces with paper towel. Place the pot on the stove over medium-high heat. Bring the stock to a gentle simmer and cook for 2-3 minutes. Test for tenderness: insert a toothpick or thin bamboo skewer in a piece of *kabocha*. It should meet with some slight resistance at this stage.

Because there is a broad range of cooking times for different varieties of *kabocha* be prepared to add up to 2 or more minutes to reach the “some slight resistance” stage. Carefully flip all the pieces of *kabocha* over so that the skin faces up.



Add the *saké* and sugar. Replace the dropped lid (or paper towel) and simmer for about 2 more minutes until barely tender. (Test again with a toothpick; you should be able to pierce the skin without much difficulty, but it should not be so soft that the *kabocha* crumbles.)

Add the soy sauce and continue to simmer for another minute. Add more stock if needed to keep the *kabocha* covered while it simmers. Test again. The toothpick should meet no resistance whatsoever now.

Remove the pot from the heat. It is in this cooling down stage that the flavor of the simmering broth is drawn in to the *kabocha*. While waiting for the *kabocha* to cool, prepare the okra.

The Japanese flash-blanch technique for preparing okra heightens its color (jade green) and flavor (reminiscent of green beans and/or asparagus) while limiting its sticky texture. There are FOUR KEY POINTS to Flash-Blanching Okra:



1. Trimming away the ridge at stem end (KEZURI-TORU 削り取る)
2. Salt-rubbing the pod (SHIO-ZURI 塩ずり)
3. Flash-blanching YUGAKU 湯掻く
4. Steeping in cold *dashi* stock (HITASU 浸す)

To flash-blanch:

Bring a pot of water to a rolling boil over high heat. Add the (trimmed and salt-rubbed) okra pods to the pot. When the water returns to a boil, cook for 45 seconds to 1 minute.

As you lift the okra from the boiling water to transfer it to the pot in which the *kabocha* is cooling you may see some viscose drip... don't worry, this will not mar the final dish.

Drain the flash-blanching okra but **DO NOT** “refresh” the okra in ICE WATER! As food cools it absorbs the flavor of the liquid surrounding it – you don't want the okra to taste like cold water... you want it to be *umami*-enhanced by the flavorful broth in which the *kabocha* was simmered. When ready to serve, arrange okra leaning against pieces of *kabocha*.

Classic Soy-Simmered Kabocha (with variations)

かぼちゃ煮物 (色々)
Kabocha no Nimono (Iro iro...)



Classic Soy-Simmered *Kabocha* is delicious on its own... but there are also many wonderful variations, too.

(Variation #1): served with a briefly blanched green vegetable such as okra ...

(Variation #2): sauced with savory ground chicken or turkey...

(Variation #3): simmered in stock infused with cinnamon and ginger

Separate recipes for each of these posted to KCCC Projects.

KITCHEN NOTES

Recipes for *dashi* stocks can be found at a Taste of Culture's website:

Kelp Alone Stock:

<https://tasteofculture.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Kelp-Alone-Stock.pdf>

Standard Sea Stock: [https://tasteofculture.com/wp-](https://tasteofculture.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Standard-Sea-Stock-Smoky-Sea-Stock.pdf)

[content/uploads/2020/08/Standard-Sea-Stock-Smoky-Sea-Stock.pdf](https://tasteofculture.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Standard-Sea-Stock-Smoky-Sea-Stock.pdf)