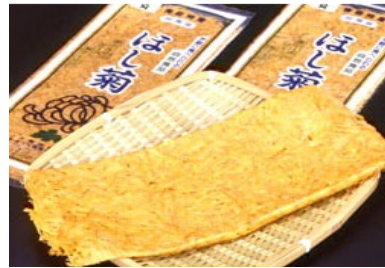


Chrysanthemum and Enoki Mushroom Salad

Hoshi-Giku to Enokidaké no Nihai-zu

菊花とエノキの二杯酢



Chrysanthemums were originally imported from China as a medicinal plant in the 8th century. They have been enjoyed in Japan as a decorative plant and in culinary ways for hundreds of years. The Tohoku and Hokuriku regions are especially known for their chrysanthemum dishes. Fresh flower petals are pickled in sweet vinegar... and petals, plucked from fresh flowers are also dried into sheets to extend shelf life.

Just before the frost falls fresh flowers are gathered, steamed, pressed and dried into thin, flat sheets, called *hoshi-giku* (lower right in photos above). These bright yellow sheets call to mind the laver, *nori*, you see at the sushi bar. Indeed in Aomori Prefecture's Hachinohe, *hoshi-giku* sheets are wound around thick logs of mackerel-topped sushi to make a local delicacy called *saba jin*. In most of the Tohoku, however, sheets of *hoshi-giku* are torn into pieces and the petals then scattered or mixed with other foods. Such is the case in this Chrysanthemum and Enoki Mushroom Salad.

SERVES 4 to 6 as an appetizer.

1 package *enoki* mushrooms, about 3 ounces/85 grams
1 cup *Dashi* (basic sea stock) or Kelp Alone Stock
1/2 tablespoon *mirin*
1/2 tablespoon light-colored soy sauce (*usukuchi shōyu*)
1/2 sheet dried chrysanthemum petals (*hoshi-giku*), about 1/4 ounce
2 tablespoons brown rice vinegar (*kuro-zu*)

(optional) *mizuna* or micro-greens, torn into bite-sized pieces, washed, and spun-dry

Trim away the bottom half of a cluster of *enoki* mushrooms; the remaining stem and caps should be cut in half-inch lengths. Place the mushroom pieces in a small pot with *dashi* stock seasoned with *mirin* and light-colored soy sauce. Place the pot on the stove and slowly bring the liquid to barely a boil. Add the dried chrysanthemums, stir to break up the flower petals and remove the pot from the heat. Stir to be sure the flower petals are well distributed and completely moistened by the warm broth. Set aside until the broth is cool, about 20 minutes. It is in this cooling down period that flavors meld and the flower petals become tender.



Add the vinegar to the pot, stir, and let sit for 5 minutes. The dish is ready to serve, though if you prefer, it can be made to this point in advance and refrigerated for several hours. Drain excess liquid just before serving, coaxing the flower petal and mushroom mixture into individual mounds.

If you want to add volume, and crunch to the salad, serve over a bed of *mizuna* lettuce or toss with a mixture of micro-greens.



EDIBLE FLOWERS (*shoku yō-bana*): 食用花

Most flowers are ornamental (used for decorative purposes), though many have medicinal, cosmetic, and culinary applications. In western kitchens edible marigolds (*Calendula officinalis*), nasturtiums (*Tropaeolum majus*), and primroses (*Primula vulgaris*) are often prepared, like their Asian cousin the *shoku yō kiku* (*Chrysanthemum coronarium*). Flowers, though consumed in relatively small quantities, are rich in minerals and vitamins, especially A and C.

A word of caution, however: **do NOT forage from a florist's display**. Chemicals used in growing such flowers can be toxic.

Japan is not the only Asian food culture to cook with chrysanthemums; if you are having trouble sourcing fresh or dried flowers in your community, I suggest you check your local Korean and Chinese markets, too.