



Shōjin Goma-Dōfu

精進胡麻豆腐



Temple Vegetarian Sesame Pudding

Buddhism came to Japan by way of Korea in the 6th century and influenced many aspects of Japanese culture including dietary practices. What came to be known as *shōjin ryōri*, temple or Buddhist vegetarian food, shuns the consumption of all animal foods, and admires earnest effort (indeed, that is the true meaning of the word “*shōjin*”).

Goma-dōfu, a creamy-smooth sesame pudding, is historically associated with *fucha ryōri*, a Chinese-style of Buddhist cookery that arrived in Japan with Zen Priest Ingen in 1654. The pudding is a quintessential *shōjin* dish because the very act of preparing it exemplifies a virtue extolled in Buddhist practice (and Japanese society, at large): *dōryoku*... diligence.

Making the pudding from scratch requires patience, time and above all diligent attention to the task at hand. Sesame seeds need to be slowly, carefully toasted before being ground to a smooth, oily paste in a *suribachi* (grooved mortar). Next the sesame paste is mixed with a combination of *kombu* (kelp) broth and an arrowroot-like starch called *kudzu*. Slowly, patiently the sesame-*kudzu-kombu* broth mixture is cooked, all the while stirring, constantly stirring, until thick and slightly elastic. Within temple communities, making *goma-dōfu* is often a task assigned to acolytes as part of their spiritual training.

Not meaning to be disrespectful, there are (slightly) easier ways to make this yummy pudding. You can use commercially prepared *neri goma* instead of roasting and crushing sesame yourself. And you can use a food processor, blender, or other appliance in lieu of a (laboriously arm-powered) *suribachi*. If you decide to use one (or more) of these “shortcuts” you can still express *kansha*, the Buddhist sense of appreciation, by acknowledging your gratitude for both artisanal products (such as sesame paste) and modern technology (electric-powered gadgets).

Even if you use these conveniences, *kudzu* (the starch that provides substance and body to the pudding) can be quirky to work with. Be prepared to crush it to a fine powder BEFORE mixing with the kelp broth. Be sure to dissolve it well in the kelp broth BEFORE adding the sesame paste and applying heat to the mixture. You will need to cook the mixture s-l-o-w-l-y over low heat while STIRRING CONSTANTLY.

Goma-dōfu is most often made with white sesame seeds (or paste) resulting in a pudding that is pale beige in color. Black seeds (or paste) will make a deep charcoal grey pudding (I think the black seeds have a slightly more intense nutty flavor than the white). Serving a bit of both alongside of each other makes a rather dramatic presentation.

This reference sheet re-visits the recipe I provided in my 2010 cookbook [KANSHA: Celebrating Japan's Vegan and Vegetarian Traditions](#) (Ten Speed Press). There I offered what I called a **MODERN**-convenience method and described the **CLASSIC** diligent-*dōryoku* method in a sidebar. Here I streamline the modern method while offering an option to use a *suribachi*-ground paste to create a rather rustic version with some extra texture.

Makes 6 to 8 servings

1 1/4 cups Kelp Alone Stock

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

3 1/2 tablespoons (about 1 ounce) crushed *kudzu* (see bottom page 3)

pinch of sugar & pinch of salt

2/3 cups untoasted (white or black) sesame seeds

OR

6 tablespoons white or black sesame paste

OR

RUSTIC VERSION:

1/3 cups untoasted (white or black) sesame seeds

AND

4 tablespoons white or black sesame paste



Garnish & Sauce:

1/2 teaspoon wasabi

2 tablespoons Seasoned Vegan Soy Concentrate

(<https://tasteofculture.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/VeganSSC-2020.pdf>)

OR

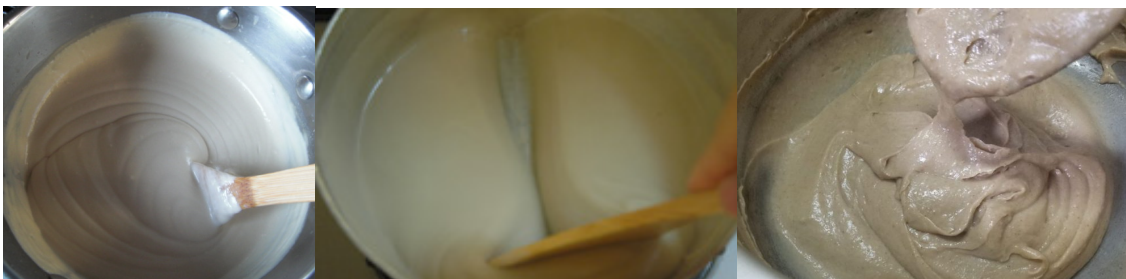
2 tablespoons soy sauce



Begin by crushing the *kudzu*; I find forcing it through a strainer placed over a bowl is effective. Add the Kelp Alone Stock to the crushed *kudzu* and stir. Add the sesame paste and continue to stir until there are no lumps. Transfer the mixture to a pot.

Place the pot over low heat, add a bit of sugar and salt, and begin to cook the mixture, stirring all the while. I recommend using a long-handled, broad-paddled wooden spoon (or a sturdy silicon spatula). Alternate stirring clockwise and counterclockwise, occasionally stirring in a figure “8” pattern. Scrape down the sides frequently. After several minutes it will begin to thicken. With your spoon or spatula, you should be able to draw a line that remains visible for several moments along the bottom of the pan.

Cook for 10 more minutes, continuing to stir constantly. Large bubbles will form looking somewhat like molten lava (the long-handled stirring tool is to protect your hands from splatters as these bubbles swell and burst). Continue to stir the mixture in a slow and steady manner until it becomes very thick and somewhat translucent, probably another 15 to 20 minutes.



If you will be making the RUSTIC version (adding *suribachi*-ground sesame paste in addition to the commercially prepared very smooth paste), now is the time to add it.

Pour the cooked sesame pudding mixture into a smooth-surfaced loaf mold; I find glass or enamel, or ceramic surfaces work well. (Chilling your mold for 30-45 minutes ahead of time will make unmolding later easier; I usually place my mold in the refrigerator as I start crushing the *kudzu*).

Although not traditional, small ceramic ramekins can be used to form and serve individual portions that won't need to be unmolded. Similarly, mini-muffin cup-liners are handy; once the pudding has firmed, the foil liners can be peeled off.

Immediately after pouring the *kudzu*-thickened sesame mixture into your mold, tap it lightly to release any air bubbles. Smooth the top surface and cover it to keep it from forming an unpleasant "skin." Professional chefs will place a flat sheet of glass directly on the pudding. Clear plastic wrap pressed against the pudding will also work well. Once the pudding has cooled and firmed, the glass or plastic wrap can be peeled off.



The pudding will set at room temperature within 15 to 20 minutes. If you wish to serve the pudding chilled, refrigerate for no more than 30 minutes. Place a cutting board over the top of your container and invert, lifting off the loaf pan. Slice in half, lengthwise, then across 2 or 3 times to yield 6 to 8 blocks. Transfer to individual serving dishes and garnish the top of each with a small dab of wasabi.

Either serve the Seasoned Vegan Soy Concentrate (or regular soy sauce) in a small pitcher and let each person drizzle his or her own, or serve the sauce in individual dipping dishes, much as you would soy sauce for nuggets of sushi.

Creamy sesame pudding will keep for several days if refrigerated. To restore the creamy texture, bring the pudding back to room temperature before serving.

If you have used individual cups, garnish each with *wasabi* just before serving with seasoned soy sauce on the side. If you wish to make bite-size appetizers of the pudding, pour the pudding mixture into crinkle-edged small foil candy cups. When set, peel away the foil and invert; place a dab of *wasabi* in the center.

葛 **KUDZU** starch from Yoshino (near Nara) is considered the best.



The *kudzu* plant has small purple-pink flowers. In addition to the root that is processed to make the white starch pictured above, the flowers, leaves and stems are also used in making herbal medicines and cosmetics.