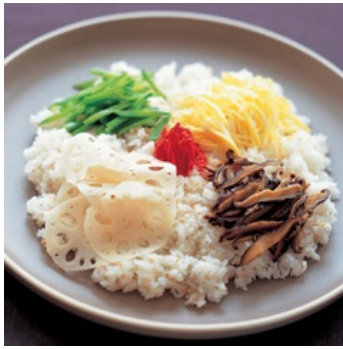


Making Thin Omelet Sheets (for decorative use)



Thin Omelet (recipe on page 290)

Usu Tamago Yaki 薄玉子焼き

chirashi-zushi ちらし寿司

(Scattered-style sushi, decorated with egg shreds)

© Leigh Beisch (photo from WASHOKU page 146)

Thin omelets are used in many Japanese dishes, most often sliced into narrow ribbons, and scattered over *sushi* rice (above) or chilled noodles, or to wrap or enclose other foods. The classic technique for making these crepe-like omelets is flipping them with a single chopstick -- a skill that admittedly takes a bit of practice to master. Once you've mastered it, there are lots of ways to use the omelets (the chopstick-flipping technique makes blini and crepes, too!).



Thin omelets can be made in an ordinary round skillet

OR

in a square or rectangular *tamago yaki nabé*, either non-stick or tin-lined copper.

For those with little or no experience in thin omelet making, use a small (5 to 6-inch diameter) non-stick surfaced skillet. Thick rolled omelets (Washoku pg. 287) are difficult (though not impossible) to shape in a round pan. If you will be buying a rectangular skillet (to make thick, rolled omelets), a non-stick one about 5 by 7 inches is best.

BASIC PROPORTIONS & PROCEDURES:

Several extra-large or jumbo-sized eggs will easily make 4 or 5 circular omelets or 3 or 4 rectangular sheets. Some ROOM TEMPERATURE liquid needs to be added (usually *dashi* stock and/or *saké*) to break the viscosity of the eggs. Use 3-4 tablespoons liquid for every 2 or 3 eggs. The eggs need to be seasoned, with both salt (brightens color, retards spoilage) and sugar (mellows salt, retards spoilage), though the amount can be adjusted to suit your own taste.

Depending upon the use of the final sheets, the intensity of color and tensile strength can also be altered. Adding a few extra drops of stock will lighten the color considerably; it will also "stretch" the mixture to yield more sheets. If the sheets will wrap other foods, you can strengthen them by adding a thin cornstarch paste (1 teaspoon cornstarch mixed with 1 tablespoon cold water) to the seasoned egg mixture.

These re-enforced sheets are used to make *chakin* (purses) and/or *fukusa* (folded packets). A fun-filled example is making “kimono” robes for edible dolls shaped from *chirashi-zushi*, usually served on Hina Matsuri (Doll’s Day... celebrated on March 3). Fashion chrysanthemums by folding over egg sheet and snipping fringe; roll up and tuck into *obentō*. Lay *nori* over omelet and roll; cut into swirls. Shred for topping *chirashi-zushi*.



When mixing the eggs with seasonings use cutting motions rather than beating or whipping. You want to AVOID INCORPORATING AIR as you mix. Begin by breaking the eggs into a bowl and with chopsticks (or a fork), break the yolks. Japanese sugar and salt easily dissolve in room temperature eggs; granulated sugar and table salt (the kind that pours) that is more commonly found in American and European kitchens can be gritty. It will be best for you to season the liquid (*dashi*, *saké*) first, and then add the COOLED seasoned liquid to the eggs.

COOKING the OMELETS



Even if you are using a pan coated with a non-stick substance, it is best to wipe the pan with an oiled swab of paper toweling before making each omelet.

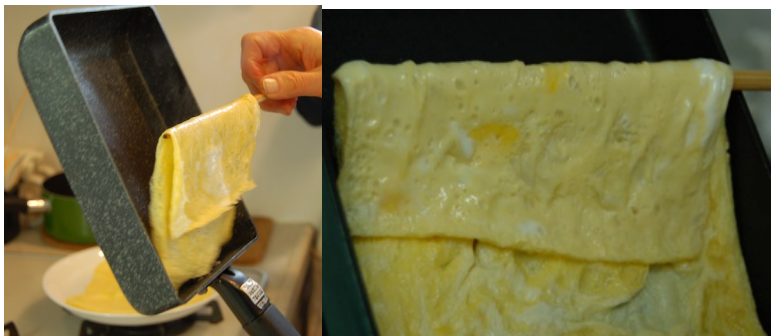
Heat your pan over medium heat. Test the temperature with the tip of a chopstick that has been dipped into the egg mixture. When the chopstick is touched to the surface of the pan, the egg should sizzle but not color and cling to the chopstick. If the egg sticks to the pan, it is not hot enough; if the egg browns, the pan is too hot.



When the pan is ready, pour in a measured amount of the egg mixture. If using a small round pan, pour in a scant quarter cup of the egg mixture for each sheet. If using a standard rectangular pan, pour in a full quarter cup of the egg mixture for each omelet. Use smooth, swirling motions to tilt and rotate the pan, allowing the egg mixture to cover the surface evenly.

Cook over medium heat until the edges of the omelet shrink a bit from the sides of the pan. Remove the pan from the source of heat and let the egg sheet continue to cook by retained heat for another 20-30 seconds before flipping it over. Try doing this the Japanese way:

Trace around the edge of the omelet with the tip of a single chopstick to be sure it is not sticking to the sides of the pan. Using a combination of twirling and twisting strokes, work the chopstick under the egg sheet across its width. Lift up (the omelet is now draped across the chopstick) and invert the omelet.



Allow the other side to dry off (at the most 30 seconds additional exposure to heat), then flip it out of the skillet.

Continue to make the omelets, in the same manner, stacking them as you go. When the omelets have cooled enough to handle them comfortably, shake out any "wrinkles." Slice into shreds if you wish.

Thin omelet such as these will keep for 5 days, covered, and refrigerated.

