

あられ Araré & 欠き餅 Kaki Mochi Crisp-and-Crunchy Rice Snacks



When listening to the weather report *araré* means “hailstones” but in the kitchen (or other culinary setting) it means “small cubes” or fine-diced *omochi* (sticky rice cakes) that have been fried or baked (pictured above, left). Thinly shaved slivers of dried *omochi* that are baked or fried are called *kaki mochi* or sometimes *okaki* (pictured above, right). No matter what shape, and regardless of what you call these snacks, they are delicious – addictively, so!

No doubt the origin of this snack is linked to the Japanese no-waste philosophy of *mottanai*, that compels frugal folks to make good use of leftovers. After displaying ceremonial *omochi* cakes called *Kagami Mochi* (below, top) during the New Year holiday period they typically dry out and begin to crack (below, left). The less-than-fresh but nonetheless important rice cakes (*kagami mochi* is a gift to the New Year gods that protect the household and community) are given a second chance to be appreciated.



In a special ceremony called *Kagami-Biraki* (literally “Opening the Mirror”) performed on the 11th day of January, the large cracking disks of *omochi* are shattered into small bits and pieces with a wooden mallet.

The word *biraki*, based on the verb *hiraku* (to open), is a more auspicious way to describe the shattering asunder of stiffened rice cakes than the violent verbs *waru* (to split), *tataku* (to pound, smash or thwack) and *kiru* (to cut up, to kill).

Smashing the old, cracked *omochi* with a wooden mallet produces many small, irregular pieces (above, bottom right). Nothing goes to waste in the traditional Japanese *mottanai*-practicing kitchen... these bits and pieces are eaten in a variety of ways. I think crisp-and-crunchy **ARARÉ** nuggets or *kaki mochi* pieces are the tastiest!

Crisp-and-Crunchy Rice Snacks. Makes about 12 portions (about 10 pieces per portion).

1/2 sheet *noshi mochi* (rolled out soft Japanese *omochi*) OR 16 pieces *kiri mochi* (individually wrapped “single piece” rectangles)

2 cups vegetable oil

Optional finishing touches:

1/4 teaspoon sea salt + pinch *ao nori* sea herb

OR

1/4 teaspoon *shichimi tōgarashi* (seven spice blend)

OR

1/2 teaspoon *iri goma* (roasted sesame seeds; white, black or a mixture) + pinch salt

Using a sharp knife, cut a full sheet of *noshi omochi* in half, then again in half. Continue cutting halves until you have produced 32 small rectangles, each about 50 grams/2 ounces and measuring 2 in/6.5 cm long, 1.5/4 cm wide, 1/2 in/1.5 cm thick. For this recipe you will use half of these – 16 rectangles. Or, use 16 pre-cut “single piece” *kiri mochi*. Each of these pieces, in turn, needs to be further cut in half, lengthwise and then across 3 times to produce 8 cubes from each piece. You should have a total of 128 cubes.



Spread out the cubes in a single layer on **EITHER** a cookie sheet lined with parchment (for oven-drying at 200F/95C for about two hours, turning pieces every 15 minutes) **OR** a rack or other flat surface that permits air to circulate. Traditionally woven bamboo *zaru*, similar to what is used to air-dry pickled plums, is used. Air-drying takes about a week, turning the pieces each day. **VERY DRY, CRACKED RICE** is the key to crispy-and-crunchy fried snack bits.

Place oil in a shallow, wide, but sturdy pan. Heat the oil to about 320F/160C. Test with wooden chopsticks. Small foamy bubbles should appear to cling to the chopsticks. **CAREFULLY** add about 1/4 of the cubes (30 cubes) into the oil. They will not color, but after a few minutes should appear to have swollen slightly in size.



Continue to fry for another minute; the cubes will lose their shape and begin to puff into irregular-surfaced, roundish forms. Stir to be sure all surfaces of the pieces are coming in contact with the frying oil and raise the temperature of the oil slightly to 375F/190C. The frying bits of omochi will gradually color to a burnished brown (the Japanese call this *kitsune iro* or fox-colored). Be careful not to over-fry. Drain onto paper towel and while still warm, sprinkle with one of the (optional) finishing touches. If you prefer, sprinkle with just salt.

Spread out and allow the pieces to cool thoroughly before nibbling (they will taste better once cooled and less likely to burn your mouth). Store in a cool, dry spot for up to one month (longer and they tend to get stale or soggy).

