

Crunchy *Kushi Agé* カリカリ串揚げ (*Kari Kari Kushi Agé*)



Makes 24 skewers

8 skewers of pork or chicken or *tōfu*, coated in fine *panko* (see PANTRY NOTES)

8 skewers of vegetables coated in *harusamé* (see PANTRY NOTES)

8 skewers of vegetables coated in *dōmyōjiko* (see PANTRY NOTES)

Equipment: 24 thin bamboo skewers

170 grms/6 ounces pork loin or shoulder sliced into 8 (2-inch/5-cm length) strips

OR boneless, skinless chicken (breast or thigh) sliced into 8 (2-inch/5-cm length) strips

OR 1/2 pkg *tōfu*, well drained and cut into 8 (2-inch/5-cm length) slabs

Various Vegetables:

sweet potato, scrubbed but peel left on, sliced in (1/4-inch/1/2-cm thick) rounds

lotus root, peeled, sliced in (1/4-inch/1/2-cm thick) rounds

kabocha, seeds and pith removed, peel scrubbed (1/4-inch/1/2-cm thick)

zucchini (trimmed, cut in half lengthwise, 1.5-inch/4-cm long sticks)

round yellow or red onion (1/4-inch/1/2-cm thick) wedges

shishitō peppers whole (slit to keep from popping)

fresh *shiitaké*, stem removed

1/3 – 1/2 cup cornstarch (to dust meat, chicken, vegetables, *tōfu*)

1/3 cup unflavored soymilk OR 1 small egg, beaten with a few drops of water

1 scant ounce/25-30 grams dried *harusamé* (“spring rain” noodles) or Chinese bean thread noodles (*ryokutō mamé*), about 1/3 cup when cut (instructions PANTRY NOTES)

1/3 cup *dōmyōjiko* crushed rice

vegetable oil for deep-frying

1/4 teaspoon *sanshō* pepper (see PANTRY NOTES) mixed with 1/4 teaspoon salt

Choose your items and cut-and-prepare them. Dust each item in cornstarch before inserting a thin bamboo skewer in it. Do not leave the tip of the skewer exposed (stop short of the end). You can thread several items on a single skewer. *Kushi agé* are fried after they have been dredged and coated on skewers.



You will need to have soymilk or egg wash and *harusamé* noodles, *dōmyōjiko* crushed rice and fine *panko* breadcrumbs each in its own shallow container.

- FIRST dip the dusted, skewered item in soymilk or egg wash.
- NEXT coat with either noodles, rice or breadcrumbs.



When coating your items with noodle bits or rice pebbles or breadcrumbs, use shoveling, scooping motions to apply the coating to all surfaces. Do NOT press – this will cause the coating to fall off.

Don't be concerned by gaps between bits of noodles or rice coating before frying – each piece of noodle or rice will puff and expand considerably.

Repeat the dipping-and-coating procedure until all the skewers have been coated.

Skewers can be coated 1 to 2 hours in advance of frying. If you plan on doing so, cover the skewers lightly with paper towels, then refrigerate until it's time to fry them.

GUIDELINES and CLUES when DEEP FRYING:

- ◆ Have at least a depth of 1.5 inches/10 cm of oil in pan (wok-shaped pan gives greater depth with less volume of oil)
- ◆ Be sure there is enough space (diameter of pan) to fry at least 3 or 4 sticks at one time
- ◆ Pre-heat oil to 375 degrees F/190 C. **TEST TEMPERATURE** with a bit of the coating (eggwash or soymilk to which a few breadcrumbs OR *harusamé* OR *dōmyōjiko* clings). Ideally the coating should sizzle and foam, but not color or burn, on the surface.

If test crumbs sink and take more than 20 seconds to rise, the oil is not hot enough. Raise the heat source slightly and wait for 1 minute before re-testing.

If test crumbs start to color immediately, the oil is too hot. Stir to cool and lower the heat source slightly.

- ◆ **Fry UNDISTURBED** until lightly colored at the edges, about 1 to 1 and 1/2 minutes. Flip and fry undisturbed for another 45 seconds to a minute. DO NOT FLIP BACK & FORTH! Check that all surfaces are a golden brown, what the Japanese call *kistune iro* or “fox colored.”
- ◆ Remove the skewers to a rack. Flip the skewers after 30 seconds to drain evenly.
- ◆ Skim away any litter (bits of coating) from the oil between batches. Fry remaining pieces in the same manner.

PANTRY NOTES

道明寺粉 *dōmyōjiko* (pebbly *mochi-gomé* rice)



Used primarily in the making of *wagashi* (Japanese confectionery), *dōmyōjiko* has a distinctive texture – almost like fine pebbles. It is made from *mochi-gomé* (“sticky” rice) rather than *uruchi mai* (table rice); the *mochi-gomé* is steamed before being dried. Once dried, the rice is known as *hoshi ii* 乾飯. *Hoshi ii* is then crushed to make *dōmyōjiko*. Both forms of steamed-and-dried rice are shelf stable and, in the days before refrigeration, was an important food source. Store in a dark, dry, cool spot.

春雨 *harusamé* (mung bean *ryokutō mamé*) noodles

Cut noodles into short (1/4-inch/1-cm) lengths. Noodles can be cut weeks in advance and stored in an airtight container on your shelf.



Cutting the brittle noodles **using a food processor:**

Fit the machine with the metal blade, pull apart the noodles as best you can, placing them around the blade to load the bowl evenly. Pulse-process with many short stops and starts. It will make an enormous amount of noise. As the large mass begins to break up, you may want to remove half or even two-thirds of the noodle pieces and continue processing in small batches. Because the friction is so great, the bowl may begin to feel a bit warm to the touch. If that happens, let the machine rest for a minute or two, then continue to process until all the pieces are no longer than 1/2 inch long.

Cutting the brittle noodles **using scissors:**

Use the sharpest pair you have, or use heavy-duty kitchen shears. Place the noodles inside a large, sturdy, clear plastic bag. Place the hand in which you're holding the scissors inside the bag. Secure the bag to your wrist with string or a rubber band, but be careful not to make your tie uncomfortably tight. Snip away at the noodles, assured that the small pieces won't fly all over your kitchen.

細目パン粉 *hosomé panko* (fine-textured breadcrumbs)

Standard Japanese *panko* usually resembles shard-like flakes. That is fine for large cutlets or other big pieces. But for chicken, fish or *tōfu kushi agé*, finer textured *hosomé panko* is a better choice. Some brands used rather sweet bread (honey is listed as one of the ingredients) and those will brown quickly even at low temperatures.



山椒 *sanshō* pepper or Japanese prickly ash (*Zanthoxylum piperitum*), is a deciduous shrub that produces tender aromatic leaves called *kinomé* in the early spring. Female plants produce green *mi* or berries as spring turns to summer. These ripen in the fall, turning brown and split to reveal shiny black seeds.

The green berries are plucked late in May or early June and either crushed and used fresh in season, or preserved whole for future use. The fresh berries possess an extraordinary aroma, and if there is any way of obtaining them, I urge you to do so.

They freeze well, as is; no need to blanch them first. The preserved berries, both brined and soy-stewed are often available in overseas markets, sometimes in glass jars, sometimes in vacuum-sealed packets (transfer the contents to a clean glass jar after opening).

The most commonly available form of this spice is as *sanshō* powder (*konazanshō*) made from cracking and crushing dried green berries. Seeds taken from mature berries are also ground to produce a pungent pepper with a lemony tang.

Store in a cool, dry, dark spot.

