

AMA-ZAKÉ AISU Frozen Ama-Zaké 甘酒アイス



Ama-zaké has been part of the Japanese pantry for thousands of years. During the Muromachi period (1392-1573) *ama-zaké* consumption took on a regional identity: In and around Kyoto, it was sipped in the summertime as a stamina drink to fortify a heat-weary metabolism, while in the Edo plains (what is now Tokyo) it was a drunk to ward off chills on frigid nights. Frozen desserts and smoothies made from *ama-zaké* are a modern (21st century) adaptation.

Whether you serve *ama-zaké* hot or cold, it is rich in vitamin B, health-boosting probiotics, and metabolism-boosting digestive enzymes. Because it is digested slowly, it has a low glycemic index making it a “good” sweetener. And it has relatively few calories (about 134 calories per 100 grams).

Ama-zaké needs to be kept refrigerated and should be consumed by the date indicated on the package. But you can freeze it to extend shelf life by several months. And by freezing it you’ll be able to make this fabulous frozen dessert: *Ama-Zaké Aisu*. You can have fun trying all sorts of flavors, but my favorite is BANANA-GINGER.

Makes about 1 quart:

- 2 cups (about 500 ml) *ama-zaké* (sweet rice mash)
- 2 small bananas, about 5 ounces each, peeled and sliced
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon ginger juice, extracted from freshly grated ginger
- a drop of *usukuchi shōyu* (light-colored soy sauce)

Place the *ama-zaké* in a blender; pulse-processing to make it creamy and smooth. Add the banana, and pulse-process until fully blended. Add the lemon to balance acidity, and to hold color. Add the ginger juice for added flavor. Pulse-process to blend.



Taste the mixture before adding a drop or two of *usukuchi shōyu*. The saltiness helps to balance and brighten flavors. Pour the mixture into a freezer-safe container with a lid that fits snugly. Tap the container gently on your kitchen counter to release any air bubbles that might be trapped below the surface. Cover and freeze for at least 4 hours. The final frozen dessert will be a bit soft and easy to scoop out.

In making *ama-zaké* (sweet rice mash) equally amounts of cooked rice, and *komé kōji* (the same healthful mold spores used to make miso) are mixed and allowed to sit for 6-8 hours. During this time, micro-organisms in *kōji* break down the rice starches and convert them to sugar. The result is a sweet mash, with bits of rice suspended in a thick, cloudy liquid. Because fermentation is not allowed to continue, the alcohol level is extremely low. Traditionally *ama-zaké* has been served to children (and labels do not need to include alcohol).