



Sekihan (Festive Red Rice and Beans) 赤飯

Red signifies felicity and red foods are often served on special, festive occasions. In Japanese culinary matters, red ranges from crimson to pink, includes orangy hues and maroon, too. In this dish small red *adzuki* beans are pre-cooked to release a dark red liquid that is used to tint the rice as it steams. If you can source *sasagé mamé* (a variety of adzuki) the color will be brighter.



The rice used in making this dish is not ordinary table rice (what the Japanese call *uruchimai*; left), but rather *mochigomé* or sticky rice (sometimes labeled as glutinous or sweet rice; pictured on the right).

うるち米

もち米

This dish takes time to make – to soak the rice in red bean-tinted water (several hours) and to steam the rice (a total of 45 minutes, sprinkling it with red bean-tinted water every 10 minutes).

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup *sasagé mamé* (*Vigna unguiculata*; small red adzuki)
- 3 cups water
- 3 cups *mochigomé*
- goma shio* as garnish

Rinse the beans in tap water and drain them before placing the beans in a pot with 3 cups fresh tap water. Place the pot over medium heat and bring the beans to boil. Simmer for 10 minutes. The liquid will turn red. Remove the pot from the stove and let the beans cool in the red liquid, about 20 minutes. Strain and reserve the red liquid and beans, separately.

While the beans are simmering, rinse the *mochigomé* rice in tap water and drain. The grains will turn chalky white as they absorb a bit of the rinsing water.

Once you have strained off the red tinted water from the beans, use **half** of this colored liquid to soak the rice for at least 2 hours and up to 12 (you may find it suits your schedule better to do this overnight), reserving the other half to use during the steaming process. The rice will become tinted as it soaks in the red bean water. If you will be setting aside the soaking rice for more than 4 hours before steaming it, cover and refrigerate.



When you are ready to steam the rice and beans, line your steamer with a fine-weave cloth. The Japanese use *sarashi* (similar to muslin) but a double layer of cheesecloth can be used instead.

Mix the beans into the rice and spread the mixture evenly over the surface of your cloth-lined steamer. Fold the edges of your cloth over the beans and rice to lightly enclose them. Cover and steam for 10 minutes.



Carefully open the steamer and cloth and sprinkle 1/3 of the remaining colored liquid over the rice and beans. Steam for another 10 minutes and repeat the sprinkling with red bean water. As you open the cloth to do this, lift it up slightly to be sure nothing is sticking to your steamer tray, and to help distribute the beans and rice evenly. Cover and steam for another 10 minutes. Sprinkle with the remaining tinted water, fold the cloth back to cover the rice and beans and steam for a final 10 minutes. Allow the steamed rice and beans to sit in the steamer off the stove for at least 10 minutes before serving. This dish is served at room temperature.



Just before serving, sprinkle with *goma shio*, a mixture of coarse sea salt and toasted black sesame. Any *sekihan* that is not eaten can be placed in a container and refrigerated for up to 3 days. The rice will become quite hard (even crusty) within a few hours of being refrigerated. Re-steam briefly before serving.