



NAGA NEGI no NUTA Japanese Leeks in Tart-Miso Sauce (長ネギのぬた)

This dish is often served as *otōshi*, an appetizer to accompany *saké*. *Nuta* is a balanced sauce combining salty-sweet miso with tart vinegar; this version is spiked with a dab of mustard. Because raw *naga negi* can be a bit harsh, it is briefly blanched to mellow it. Garnishing with toasted sesame seeds adds a nutty, crunchy accent.

Serves 4.

- 2 *naga negi*, about 250 grams/8 ounces, white and green portions, cut into 1-inch (2.5 cm) pieces
- 2 cups water
- Nuta* sauce
 - 2 tablespoons shiro miso
 - 1 tablespoon brown rice vinegar (*genmai su*)
 - Drop *mirin* (optional)
 - 1/2 teaspoon *neri karashi* (mustard paste)
 - 1 teaspoon white sesame seeds, freshly toasted

Place a small saucepan holding 2 cups of water over high heat. Bring the water to a rolling boil and blanch the (tougher) green pieces in the boiling water for a count of 20, or until the water returns to a boil. Now add the white pieces and count to 20 again. Have a strainer ready.

Drain the blanched *naga negi* and let the pieces cool naturally or hasten the cooling by fanning. DO NOT REFRESH WITH COLD WATER (cold or ice water will rob *negi* of its flavor).

In the meanwhile, prepare the *nuta* sauce. In a small bowl, stir the vinegar into the miso. Taste the mixture and adjust (if too salty) with a drop of *mirin*. Stir in the mustard to distribute evenly. Toss in the drained pieces of *naga negi* and toss to coat each piece with the sauce.

Divvy up the pieces of *naga negi* into four small individual dishes. Just before serving, garnish each with a sprinkling of toasted sesame seeds.

Pantry items (left to right):

Shiro miso, pure brown rice vinegar, mirin, mustard (tubes and powder to mix with water)

