

## TAKIKOMI GOHAN 炊き込みご飯



### **KINOKO GOHAN** **(Rice with Mixed** **Mushrooms)**

キノコご飯

*Aki no Sansaku*  
(Autumnal Stroll)

秋の散策

Each season has its own culinary pleasures and treasures, but most Japanese would agree that autumn offers the greatest variety of foodstuffs. The phrase *aki no mikaku* “autumnal delicacies” includes a wide range of dishes made from fall foods, some cultivated, others foraged. One of my personal fall favorites is *kinoko gohan*, a pilaf-like dish infused with a rich, woody flavor from broth produced by briefly braising mushrooms that are later tossed in with the cooked rice. This style of cooking is called **takikomi**.

There are myriad variations on the *takikomi* theme and all pair well with fish, chicken, egg and *tōfu* dishes. If you want to make it a more substantial rice dish toss in, or garnish with, cooked carrots and *édamamé* or green beans. If you can source vegetable cutters in seasonal motifs (maple and ginkgo leaves), have fun creating an “autumnal stroll” (*aki no sansaku*) edible landscape. See the last page for illustrations.

### **Serves 4.**

8 to 10 ounces fresh, wild mushrooms (cleaned and trimmed as described below)  
2 cups *dashi* stock (either Standard Sea Stock OR Kelp Alone Stock)  
3 tablespoons *saké*  
3 tablespoons *mirin*  
2 tablespoons *usukuchi shōyu* (light-colored soy sauce)  
2 cups raw rice, preferably short-grained Japanese-style  
Garnishes: Carrots, *Satsuma imo* potato, slender green beans

**Prepare mushrooms:** Use a combination of pine-scented *matsutaké*, black-capped *shiitaké*, ivory-colored *enokidaké*, pearly-gray *shiméjitaké* and/or ruffled *maitaké* mushrooms for a full-flavored pilaf.

**MATSUTAKÉ** If you have sourced *matsutaké* mushroom, gently wipe with a dry cloth to remove any soil, but do not wash or peel. Trim and discard the very bottom if wiping does not remove unwanted bits of the forest that may still be clinging to the mushroom. Cut the mushroom about 1/4-inch below the cap to separate cap from stem. Using your fingers, gently shred the stem (much like pulling string cheese); the irregular surface of these pieces will yield greater flavor and preserve the crisp texture. With a sharp knife, cut the caps into paper-thin slices; these will look more impressive than shreds, and be easier to identify, visually, as (extravagant) *matsutaké* mushrooms.

**SHIITAKÉ.** With a damp cloth or mushroom brush, dust fresh mushrooms to remove residual dirt. After trimming away any gritty material clinging to the stems, twist and remove them (use to enrich any stock you might make in the next day or two). Slice the caps, lengthwise, into narrow strips, or into 4 or 6 wedge-like pieces.

**ÉNOKIDAKÉ** If you're using cultivated, ivory-colored *énokidaké*, remove them from their plastic bag. Trim away the spongy moldy-looking bottom half, cutting the remaining stems into 1/2 inch-lengths.

**SHIMÉJITAKÉ** If you're using cultivated, pearly-gray *shimejitaké* the unattractive sponge-like material on which the mushrooms are grown is hidden from view with opaque packaging. When ready to use, open the package and trim away any moldy-looking bits of the stems. With your fingers, separate each mushroom from the larger mass. Break large mushrooms in half (torn is yields better flavor than cut).

**MAITAKÉ** If you're using beige-gray, ruffled *maitaké* (sometimes called "hen-of-the-woods") trim away any moldy parts of the white stems and, with your hands, separate clusters, lengthwise into thin strips (as though you were stringing string-cheese). The irregular surface that results from hand-tearing mushrooms will make them more flavorful than knife-sliced ones.

**Prepare a mushroom broth (to use for cooking rice):**

Place trimmed mushrooms in a 2 or 3-quart pot with the *dashi* stock. Set the pot over medium heat. When the liquid begins to simmer, season the stock with the *saké* and *mirin*. Continue to simmer for 1 minute. Season the broth with *usukuchi shōyu*.

Strain the contents of the pot pressing gently on the mushrooms to extract all cooking liquid. Reserve both the mushrooms and the liquid separately. Add water, if necessary, to the seasoned mushroom liquid to measure 2 and 1/3 cups in all.

**Wash the rice** thoroughly and let it drain completely. Place the drained rice and the mushroom liquid in the rice cooker or a pot (that has a tight-fitting lid).



**If cooking in an automatic rice cooker** let the rice sit for 5 minutes before pressing the switch to start cooking. The mushrooms will be returned to the cooker AFTER the cooking cycle has finished and the machine has switched to “keep warm.” Some appliances beep, others sing a jingle to alert you to this switch-over in mode.

**If cooking in a pot,** use a 3 to 3- & 1/2-quart stockpot, one that has straight sides and a tight-fitting lid. Place the washed, drained rice in the pot. Add the mushroom liquid and place the lid on the pot. Place the pot over high heat and cook for 5 minutes, or until the liquid is bubbling. Lower the heat and continue to cook for another 5 minutes or until all the liquid has been absorbed. You can usually hear the changes in the cooking stages, but if you must peek inside to check the rice's progress, do so quickly, immediately replacing the lid.

Remove the pot from the stove and let the rice self-steam for at least 10 minutes (this ensures tender grains of cooked rice). Toss in the reserved mushrooms and gently fold them into the rice.

A deeply colored and slightly crusty *OKOGÉ* ("burnt rice") often forms on the bottom of the pot (or inner rice cooker bowl). This rice is delicious! When portioning out the mushroom-and-rice pilaf be sure to divvy up the *okogé*, too.

CREATING an edible LANDSCAPE:



Cut orange carrots into maple leaves before briefly blanching them.

Slice slender, briefly blanched green beans on the diagonal to mimic pine needles.

If you can source Japanese, red-skinned sweet potatoes (*Satsuma imo*) the purple-red peels can be cut like maples and the center flesh into yellow ginkgo leaves. Make slices about 1/4" thick. Briefly blanch them in lightly salted water AFTER cutting into shapes.

