

Ika Maitake ISHIRI TAKIKOMI GOHAN
RICE COOKED WITH SQUID and
MAITAKE mushrooms
In Ishiri Fish Sauce

イカ舞茸いしり炊き込みご飯



Ishiri is one of several fermented fish sauces that is used in Japanese dishes. Ishiri, also called *ishiru*, hails from Ishikawa Prefecture's Noto Peninsula that juts in to the Sea of Japan. The region boasts many types of fish and seafood, among them squid (called *ika* in Japanese). Squid is prepared in myriad ways, one them as pilaff-like ***takikomi gohan***.

In Japanese cookery, rice that is cooked *takikomi* style makes use of a flavored liquid instead of water to cook the rice. The liquid's flavor is created by partially cooking ingredients that are then added back to the pot to finish cooking with the rice. When making *takikomi*-style rice there is no need to make a separate *dashi* stock because the various ingredients provide plenty of flavor. *Takikomi* dishes typically create a dark crust called *okogé* at the bottom of the cooking pot. These crusty, coveted bits can be divvied up among individual servings (or hoarded by the cook as a reward for making this for others).

My recipe calls for a combination of **SQUID** and **MAITAKE MUSHROOMS** cooked with the rice. Served with miso soup and tsukemono pickles, this substantial rice dish becomes the centerpiece of the meal.

As a teacher, this *takikomi* dish enables me to demonstrate the advantages of “frost-poaching,” a Japanese method for lightly poaching protein (fish, seafood, chicken, meat). Its called *shimofuri* (“frost falls”) in Japanese because the surface of the food becomes white looking like frost has fallen on it. Frost-poaching squid forces “froth” to the surface of the liquid that can easily be strained away. The final liquid is free from any scum that could cling to the grains of rice as they cook in it.

SERVES 4 (as a main course, with soup & salad or pickles)

- 2 cups Japanese-style raw rice
- 1 whole squid, about 10.5 ounces/300 grams (cleaning instructions below)
- 2 and 1/2 cups water
- 1 tablespoon *mirin* (*saké* brewed from *mochi-gomé* sweet rice)
- 1 tablespoon *ishiri* (funky fish sauce)
- 1 pkg. *maitaké* mushrooms, about 90 grms, trimmed and hand-torn into shreds

Garnish: 2 tablespoons chopped or minced scallions

Begin by washing the rice well with fresh cold water until the water runs clear. As you rinse and swish uncooked grains of rice a great deal of cloudy *togi-jiru* (starchy water) will result. Frugal households save *togi-jiru* to par-boil root vegetables such as *daikon*. *Togi-jiru* can be stored in a jar, refrigerated, for several days.

After draining the washed rice, set it in your stovetop cooking pot or the bowl of an automated rice-cooker. Set aside the rice for 20 to 30 minutes to allow the grains of rice to absorb a bit of the water with which it was washed. The grains of rice will become opaque and appear slightly plumped. As you wait for this to happen, prepare your squid and mushrooms.



Rinse the squid well under running cold water; pat dry with paper towels to make handling easier. Lay the squid out on a cutting board with tentacles extended and eyes facing up. Insert your forefinger and thumb into the mantle (body sac) just above the head. You should feel connective tissue that prevents your fingers from going further inside [above, center]. With pinching and gentle poking, sever this tissue (tendon) while easing out the viscera (innards) [above right] . Set aside the head and tentacles. Although very fresh squid viscera is often used to make *shiokara*, a fermented delicacy in Japan, we will be discarding the viscera for this dish.



Remove and discard the quill from the mantle (a transparent, stiff strip of cartilage that runs the length of the creature) [above, left]. Rinse the inside of the mantle being sure to remove any soft material that may remain (usually the gonads, heart and possibly the gills) [above, center]. Slice the mantle into thin strips [above, right].



Place the head on your cutting board and sever the arms and tentacles from the head just below the eyes [above, left]. Be careful not to pierce the sac that holds the ink. The arms and tentacles form a ring with a mass (that includes the mouth, or beak) inside. Press on the ring to make this mass bulge for easy removal. Cut the ring in half to make two clusters of appendages. Rinse the arms and tentacles well using your thumb nail to scrape off (and discard) the hard rings clinging to the suction cups [above, right].



In a saucepan bring the water, *mirin*, and *ishiri* to a boil. Adjust heat to maintain a gentle simmer and add the squid strips and pieces. Stir, or jiggle the saucepan, to keep them from sticking to each other. Within 20 or 30 seconds the surface of the pieces should become opaque. The Japanese call this blanching technique *shimofuri*, meaning “frost has fallen.” Indeed the surface appears somewhat “frosted.”

Remove the pot from the heat and strain, reserving the “frosted” squid and broth separately. If the broth appears to have scummy bits in it (from the coagulating proteins in squid) strain it through a paper towel. Although perfectly safe to consume, it looks unappetizing, especially when it clings to grains of rice. The broth will be used to cook the rice; the “frosted” squid will be tossed into the cooked rice before serving the dish.

Measure the liquid you strained from blanching the squid. Add cold water as needed to make a total of 2 cups + 2 tablespoons.

If you use **an automated rice-cooker** pour the liquid over the rice, then place the hand-torn mushroom shreds on top – do not stir. Close the lid and press “start.”

When the rice is finished cooking, most appliances play a jingle. Wait for 5 minutes to allow the rice to fully absorb the flavorful cooking liquid. Open the lid and scatter the “frosted” squid pieces on top. Re-lid and allow to sit for at least 5 minutes and up to an hour.

When ready to serve, “fluff” the rice. Use a *shamoji* paddle or other broad spatula to gently trace the edges of your pot to release the rice. With gentle folding motions, scoop down to the bottom where there is typically a darker crust called *okogé*. Lightly toss to distribute the mushrooms and squid pieces. Scoop out portions, being sure to give each some of the *okogé*. Garnish with scallions.



If you use the **stovetop method** place the drained rice in a sturdy, straight-sided pot. Pour in the 2 cups and 2 tablespoons of seasoned liquid. Place the hand-torn mushroom shreds on top – do not stir. Cover the pot with a tight-fitting lid.

Over high heat, bring the liquid in the pot to a rolling boil. Do not remove the lid to check on progress. Instead, rely on other clues; you can hear bubbling noises and see the lid begin to dance (the *choro choro* in the jingle described below). This should take about 5 minutes.

Reduce the heat and continue to cook until the water is absorbed; about 5 minutes longer. You may hear a low hissing sound (the *naka ppapa* stage described below). Lift the lid and scatter the “frosted” squid pieces on top of the mushrooms and rice. Re-lid and allow to sit for at least 5 minutes and up to an hour.



When ready to serve, “fluff” the rice. Use a *shamoji* paddle or other broad spatula to gently trace the edges of your pot to release the rice. With gentle folding motions, scoop down to the bottom where there is typically a darker crust called *okogé*. Lightly toss to distribute the mushrooms and squid pieces. Scoop out portions, being sure to give each some of the *okogé*. Garnish with scallions.

Old-fashioned Japanese rice-cooking jingle:

初めチョロチョロ、中パッパ
Hajimé choro choro, naka ppapa
At first it bubbles, then it hisses.

赤子が泣いても、蓋とるな！
Akago ga naitemo, futa toru na!
Even if the baby cries (from hunger), don't remove the lid!

