



筍ご飯

Rice with Fresh Bamboo Shoots

(*Takénoko Gohan*)



Many versions of this springtime classic add thin strips of *abura agé* (fried *tōfu*) to the sliced bamboo to boost nutrition and provide a pleasantly chewy texture that contrasts to the tender-crisp shoots. Most often a touch of spiciness is added as a garnish just before serving – either *ki no mé* (sprigs of pepper plant: above, left) or ground *kona-zanshō* pepper mixed with a pinch of sea salt (above, right).

Makes 3 cups rice, enough for 4 to 6 portions.

- 1 bamboo shoot (base, mid-section and/or tip), about 4 ounces, parboiled
- 1 sheet *abura agé* (fried *tōfu*)
- 2 cups *dashi*, preferably *oigatsuo* (Smokey Sea Stock)
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce, preferably *usukuchi shōyu* (light-colored soy sauce)
- 2 teaspoons *mirin* (syrupey rice wine)
- 1 and 1/2 cups Japanese-style white rice, washed and drained
- 10 to 12 sprigs *ki no mé* (sprigs of pepper plant)
- OR
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground *kona-zanshō* pepper, mixed with a pinch of sea salt



Cut the bamboo into thin slices. Any section of bamboo can be used but slices from the base or mid-section should be cut thinner and smaller, and they need to be simmered a bit longer than the tapered top sections.

Remove any hard chalky material that may be lodged between the layers with a toothpick, rinse away softer cheesy material. These deposits are naturally occurring calcification and not harmful to consume, though gritty and unpleasant to eat.



Blanch one sheet of *abura agé* to remove excess oil; drain. Cut into thin strips; squeeze to remove excess moisture.



Place a skillet over medium heat and add the *abura agé* strips. Saute for 1 minute until aromatic and slightly brown. Add the *dashi* and then the bamboo slices, fanning them out to cover the surface of the skillet in a single, or at most double, layer. Add the *usukuchi shōyu* and *mirin*.

Place an *otoshi-buta* or a circle of cooking parchment directly on the *abura agé* strips and bamboo slices and bring to a boil over medium heat. Lower the heat to maintain a gentle simmer and cook for 2 to 5 minutes (the longer time for bamboo slices taken from the base section). Skim away any froth.



Remove the pot from the source of heat keeping the *otoshi-buta* or parchment in place as the contents cool. It is in this slow cooling process that flavor is transferred to the *abura agé* and the bamboo becomes tender.

When the cooking liquid has cooled to nearly room temperature, strain it into a measuring cup, pressing to release as much liquid as possible.

If the strained liquid is less than 1 and 3/4 cups, add more stock or cold water to make up the difference. This flavored liquid is used instead of water to cook the rice. Set aside cooked *abura agé* and bamboo slice mixture.

COOKING the RICE:

To cook the rice on the stovetop: Place the rice and flavored liquid in a 3-quart, lidded pot. Cover and cook over steady high heat until the liquid begins to bubble, about 5-6 minutes. Adjust the heat to maintain a steady but not very vigorous boil and continue to cook, covered, until all the liquid has been absorbed, about 5 minutes more.

Remove the pot from the heat and quickly set the bamboo shoots and *abura agé* on top of the rice, re-lid immediately. Allow the rice to steam with retained heat for another 10 to 15 minutes.



To cook the rice in a rice cooker: Combine the rice with the reserved cooking liquid in the bowl of your rice cooker. Place the bamboo shoots and *abura agé* on top of the rice. **Make sure the seasoned liquid is cool, or at least room temperature, before pressing the start switch of any thermostatically controlled rice cooker.**

When ready to serve, use a *shamoji* rice paddle or 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 (delicious) crust called *okogé*.





The pilaf is delicious served immediately, warm, especially when garnished with fresh *ki no mé*.

Or... pack the rice into an *obentō* to be enjoyed at room temperature. It will keep well in a cool spot for up to several hours.

