

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 tendercrisp 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)

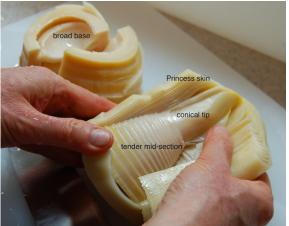
2 teaspoons *mirin* (syrupy rice wine)

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.



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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 shoyu 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 *obento* to be enjoyed at room temperature. It will keep well in a cool spot for up to several hours.

