

Umé-Shiso Doressingu うめドレッシング Plum & Shiso Dressing



Sour *uméboshi* plums and the rosy bleeding *aka-jiso* leaves they are pickled and tinted with can be transformed into a refreshing salty-tart dressing for salads and/or a sauce for chilled *tōfu* or cold noodles.



Many commercially produced products are available, but none are vegan (all contain *katsuo-bushi* fish extract), most contain oil (and are therefore high in calories) and all contain some preservatives (to stabilize the product for packaging and storage). Two products are relatively “good” in that regard: **Non-Oil Kewpie Ume Dressing** (left) is the thickness of an oil-and-vinegar mixture. and **Yamasa’s Ume Shiso Ponzu** (right) is a clear, liquid used primarily as a dip for *nabé* hotpots or in lieu of vinegar when making an oil-and-vinegar dressing.

The “secret” ingredient that makes non-oil dressings thick (and pour as though it had oil emulsified in it) is *nekombu funmatsu* 根昆布粉末 (kelp root powder). Several kinds of *kombu* are commonly used, all are high glutamate varieties. That means they will enhance the flavors of ingredients with which they are consumed (making the salad or sauce more flavorful), and exude a sticky gel-like substance (that mimics the viscosity of oil). The most viscous variety is *gagomé kombu*, sometimes marketed as *nattō kombu* because it is so sticky and gooey. Harvested from in and around Hokkaido’s port city Hakodate, the powdered form is also sold as *kombu cha*. Note: This has absolutely no relation to the fermented drinks in America called *kombucha*. Why the trendy American probiotic beverage is called “kombucha” is unclear. The Japanese beverage called *kombucha* has been consumed from at least the 5th century AD; it is made from pulverized kelp, it is not fermented. The word *cha* or “tea” is often used to describe beverages that are tea-like (infusions); true tea is brewed from *Camellia sinensis* leaves.

Below is a recipe for preparing your own plum-flavored tart dressing/sauce if you can source *bainiku* 梅肉 (plum paste) and/or *umé-zu* (plum vinegar) and/or *momi-jiso* (salt-massaged red *shiso*) that does not have artificial additives. Asian groceries in large cities and many Internet vendors sell these products.



Umi no Sei brand *benidama neri umé* plum paste (left)

S&B brand *neri umé* and *bainiku*, both plum paste (middle 2 products)

pickled plums packed with *aka-jiso* leaves(right)



Umézu (left), the intensely rosy-colored but very salty vinegar by-product from pickling plums is sometimes used to make a sweet-and-sour sauce. If using it, do not add any salt. Instead, add a generous amount of sugar, and thin with water, as needed.

Momi-jiso (right) are *aka-jiso* leaves that have been salted and squeezed. The leaves and liquid are used when pickling plums and other foods



Homemade Plum & Shiso Dressing/Sauce (Makes about 1 cup)

1/2 cup rice vinegar + 2 teaspoons sugar + 1-inch piece *kombu* (kelp)

OR

1/2 cup *umé-zu* (salty plum vinegar) + 3 T sugar + 1-inch piece *kombu* (kelp)

AND

Flesh from 2 or 3 medium-sized *uméboshi* pickled plums, mashed

OR

1 tablespoon *neri umé* (plum paste)

OR

momi-jiso leaves from pickling plums, finely minced

AND

Scant 1/2 cup *dashi* stock or cold water

Combine the vinegar, sugar and *kombu* in a small saucepan and let sit for at least 5 minutes before placing on the stove over low heat. Cook, stirring, until the sugar is dissolved, about 1 minute. Remove the saucepan from the stove and let it cool with the *kombu* in the pot. Transfer, with the *kombu*, to a small glass jar; label the jar with the date and: Plum Shiso Sauce.

Stir in the mashed plum flesh OR plum paste OR finely minced *momi-jiso* leaves while the sweetened vinegar is still slightly warm. Stir to combine well. Add stock or water and stir again (or tightly cap the jar and shake).

The finished sauce will keep, refrigerated, for 2-3 weeks.