

Steamed Egg Custard with Mushroom Sauce

Chawan Mushi no Kinoko An Kaké
茶碗蒸しのきのこ餡かけ



Chawan mushi is a silky, savory egg custard served in cups with a spoon. Various tidbits such as mushrooms, ginkgo nuts, chicken, shrimp or *kamaboko* (fish sausage) can be nestled in the custard. Or, as in this case, a plain custard is topped with a sauce. In all instances, the egg mixture is delicately seasoned with *mirin* and light-colored soy sauce.

Chawan mushi is most often served in a restaurant venue as one of many in a formal, multi-course meal. In the home setting it would be served on special occasions, demonstrating the culinary prowess and commitment of the home cook to not taking shortcuts.

Here is a recipe for those who would like to try their hand at making it. Be prepared to spend time attending to detail, especially the proportion of egg to *dashi* and controlling the temperature when steaming.

I imagine that you, too, will be making this dish for some special occasion and therefore may want to adjust the number of portions you make to the number of people you'll be serving that day. Here are some guidelines for you:

There is usually three times as much (by weight) seasoned *dashi* as there is egg. Since the average weight of a large egg is 57 grams (2 ounces), 2 large eggs would weigh about 115 grams. Multiply that by 3 to calculate your *dashi* needs and the result is 345 ml (1 and 1/4 US cups).

The recipe here uses those amounts and feeds 4 when served in small, about 1/3-cup size, ramekins or cups. Calculate your needs accordingly.

When it comes to controlling heat, you'll need to avoid boiling the custard mixture by maintaining the simmering water on the bottom of your steamer at 176-194°F (80-90°C). The water in the bottom half will start generating a good flow of steam when it is barely boiling – you'll see a few small bubbles around the rim indicating the water is about 185 F (85C).



As you steam, condensation forms on the underside of your lid. To keep this from dripping onto the surface of the custards as they cook, tie a cloth around the lid. Additionally, you could place a wooden chopstick between the lid and the steamer to allow excess moisture to escape.

Makes 4 portions custard, each about 1/3 cup.

Egg custard ingredients:

- 2 eggs
- 1 and 1/4 cups *dashi*
- 1.5 teaspoon *mirin*
- 1.5 teaspoon *usukuchi shōyu* (light-colored soy sauce)

Mushroom sauce ingredients:

- 1/4 cup *dashi*
- 1/2 teaspoon *mirin*
- 1/2 teaspoon *usukuchi shōyu* (light-colored soy sauce)
- 2 fresh *shiitaké* mushrooms, trimmed and sliced
- 1 small cluster *shimeji* (about 12 mushrooms)
- 1/2 package *enoki* mushrooms, trimmed
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch mixed with 1 teaspoon cold water

4 stalks *mitsuba* or flat-leafed parsley

Break the eggs into a bowl and beat them to mix yolks and whites thoroughly trying not to incorporate air bubbles as you do so.

Season the *dashi* with *mirin* and soy sauce, and then add it to the eggs. Strain the seasoned egg mixture to insure it is smooth and well combined.



Gently pour the seasoned and strained egg mixture into 4 heatproof serving cups. Ramekins work well if you don't have Japanese *chawan mushi* cups or *chokko* cups (for noodle dips).

Take care not to incorporate air as you pour. Any bubbles that form on the surface of the cups should be lanced or dragged to the sides with a toothpick and removed. Air bubbles will mar the final appearance of the dish.

Place the filled cups in a lidded steamer and set over medium heat. Once you hear the water beginning to boil in the bottom of your steamer, turn down the heat to barely maintain a flow of steam. Steam, undisturbed, at 185 F (85C) for about 6 or 7 minutes. Carefully slide the lid to one side to check on progress. A bit of clear liquid should have formed at the edges of each cup. If there is none, insert a toothpick in the center of the custards. If the toothpick comes out clean, proceed. If not, steam for another minute or two.



Make the mushroom sauce. Place the trimmed mushrooms in a small saucepan, add the *dashi*, *mirin*, and *usukuchi shōyu*. Simmer for 2 minutes. When ready to serve the custards, thicken the mushroom sauce with the cornstarch and water slurry-like mixture.

Turn off the heat under your steamer and allow the custards to settle, undisturbed, for about 2 minutes. Use caution when removing the lid of your steamer. Retrieve the custards with potholders and/or tongs. Spoon some of the mushroom sauce over each portion of custard and garnish with a sprig of *mitsuba*.

If you have lids for the individual cups place them over the custards as you remove them from the steamer. If you do not have lids and need to hold the custards hot for a few minutes, set a piece of parchment paper over each cup being careful to balance it on the rim. Place a saucer or other small flat plate on top to anchor the paper. Using foil to keep the cups warm is not recommended since condensation easily forms on the underside and drips down on the custards, pockmarking them. Serve as quickly as possible, with a spoon.

A word about equipment: You will need ramekins, custard cups, teacups without handles, or other heat-proof containers in which individual portions of custard can be steamed and served. The Japanese use special *chawan mushi* cups with lids – the lids are placed on top AFTER steaming.