

Buying & Cleaning Whole Squid

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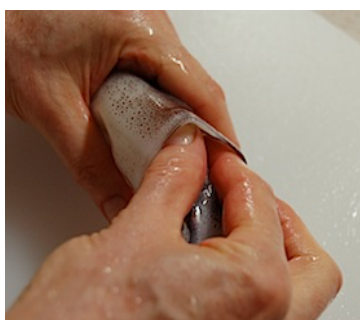
To make Gingery Soy-Seared Squid, you will need whole, fresh squid each with 10 appendages (8 arms and two longer “legs” called tentacles), two wings (these are fins), and skin intact. Size and thickness of flesh will change considerably with the variety of squid, while color variations are due mostly to chromatophores (spots that can change color allowing the creatures to camouflage themselves from prey and to communicate with each other). The natural red-hued pigmentation in the skin lends an appetizing rosy color and slight sweetness to the final dishes.

SURUME IKA (*Todarodes pacificus*) is the most readily available species of squid throughout Japan. In the Tohoku, *surumé ika* are especially plentiful, and tasty, from late spring thru summer and again from late autumn through the winter. Much of the summer catch is dried and made into jerky though fresh, griddle-seared squid is the main attraction at summer festival food stalls (*yatai*).



YARI IKA (*Loligo bleekeri*), a personal favorite, is a slender, tender and sweet-fleshed variety. Smaller than *surumé*, *yari ika* usually are the perfect size for a single portion. *Yari ika* have a relatively short season (in Japan its available from February through April) but are worth seeking out.

Cleaning Whole Squid



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] at the same time you separate the head and tentacles from the body. Set aside the head, viscera and tentacles.



Remove the quill from the mantle (a transparent, stiff strip of cartilage that runs the length of the creature) [above, left]; discard it. 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].

Leave the wings attached. Use the tip of a sharp, tapered knife to lightly score the wings and mantle on the top surface (the side that originally faced up). Be careful not to cut too deeply. This decorative scoring makes an attractive pattern and prevents the skin from ripping or curling (as the squid cooks it inevitably shrinks, curling the skin). Set aside the mantle.



Place the head on your cutting board and sever the arms and tentacles from the head and innards sac just below the eyes [upper 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 (above, upper, right). 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 around the larger suction cups [above, lower right].

The Japanese save the innards of fresh squid, curing it with salt to make a pungent-flavored, creamy-textured fermented delicacy known as *shio kara* [pictured right]; instruction for home curing, however, is beyond the scope of this document.

