



Miso-Slathered Salmon Steamed with Mushrooms in Foil Packets

鮭のきのこ味噌ホイル包み蒸し *Saké no Kinoko Miso Hoiru Tsutsumi Mushi*

Archaeological evidence dating back at least 5,000 years shows that the early inhabitants of the Tohoku region of Japan – the Jomon peoples—fished for salmon. Millennia later salmon continues to grace Tohoku tables on a regular basis. Here, salmon is combined with a variety of mushrooms and Sendai miso, a robustly flavored, russet-colored, fermented bean paste native to the area.

The miso sauce is terrific spread on many kinds of fish, from mild-flavored flounder to more assertive oily fishes such as mackerel. Well-drained, firm *tōfu* can also be prepared similarly.

INGREDIENTS:

- 4 small fillets of salmon, each about 3.5 ounces (100 grams)
- 1-2 tablespoons *saké*
- 4 pieces *kombu*, preferably flat *ma kombu*, each about 2.5 inches (7 cm)
- 4 sheets aluminum foil each about twice the size of the fish to be wrapped in it
- 2-3 ounces (50-60 grams) mushrooms such as *hon shiméji* (grey "pearl" mushrooms) AND/OR *maitaké* (grey "ruffled" mushrooms) [see Kitchen Notes](#)
- 4 tablespoons *neri miso* [see Kitchen Notes](#)
- 2 tablespoons minced scallions (for garnish)

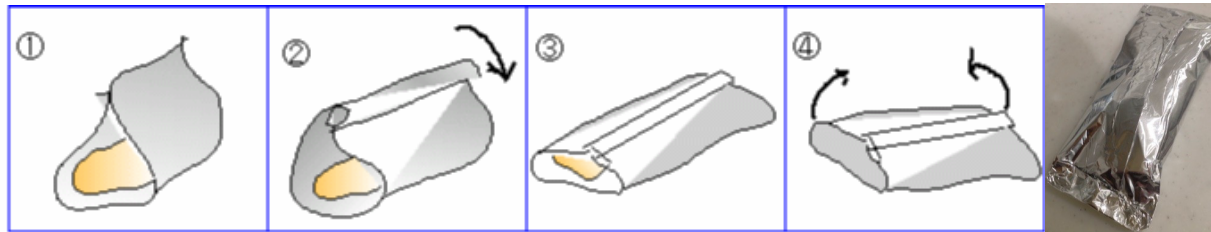
Place the fish, skin-side down, in a single layer in a glass loaf pan. Add the *saké* and turn each piece over to moisten all surfaces with the *saké*. Set aside while you trim the mushrooms ([see Kitchen Notes](#)).



Spread miso sauce over the fish before arranging mushrooms on top.

Assemble the packets: Lay four pieces of foil (shiny side up) on your cutting board or kitchen counter top. Each piece of foil should be about twice the size of the slice of fish to be wrapped in it.

Place one piece of kelp in the center of each piece of foil. Lay a piece of fish, skin side down, over the kelp. The kelp will prevent the fish from sticking to the foil (or parchment), and lend a pleasant seashore aroma to the finished dish.



Bring the ends of the foil up and together; crimp the edges to seal shut, leaving plenty of air inside each packet. If you prefer to use cooking parchment in lieu of foil, bring the ends up and together and fold over several times, leaving plenty of air inside each packet. Close the sides by folding them down and turning them under (the weight of the fish will keep them shut).

Place the packets in a steamer, cover, and over medium heat, bring the water in the bottom of your steamer to a boil. Adjust to maintain a steady simmer and steam the fish for 10 minutes (12 minutes if using parchment).



Remove the steamer from heat and carefully transfer (with tongs or pot-holdered hands) to your serving dishes. Carefully open each packet and sprinkle with some scallions. Serve piping hot; eat directly from the packet.

KITCHEN NOTES:

About **SALMON**...

3 varieties of salmon are regularly sold in Japan, any/all are suitable for this dish.

- **Beni-jaké** (紅鮭) "red salmon" *Oncorhynchus nerka*; Sockeye salmon
- **Gin-jaké** (銀鮭) "silver salmon" *Oncorhynchus kisutch*; coho salmon
- **Aki-jaké** (秋鮭) "autumn salmon" *Oncorhynchus keta*; Chum salmon

Salmon farming in Japan began early in the Meiji period (1868-1912) and continues to be big business in Japan. The industry is centered in the Tohoku region's MIYAGE Prefecture. Before the tsunami and subsequent nuclear disaster of March 2011, Minami Sanriku had become a major center for farmed Coho salmon – bringing about 15,000 tons of fish a year to Japan's domestic market. Nearly all farming operations today in the Tohoku utilize low-density net-pens that have less of an impact on surrounding ecosystems (and on the salmon themselves). Many farms are closed tank aquaculture that has zero impact on the environment. Slowly Japan's domestic salmon-farming industry is recovering, reclaiming market share from non-Japanese competitors such as Norway.

In America, Alaskan coho salmon fishery has been certified by the Marine Stewardship Council as well managed and sustainable.

In Japan from September through November wild-caught *aki-jaké*, literally "autumnal salmon," is prized. The autumn is also the season for mushrooms.

About **MUSHROOMS**...

しめじ

Shiméji or ***buna shiméji***

oyster mushrooms
(*Pleurotus ostreatus*)



It is rare to see foraged *hon shiméji* in Japanese domestic markets: nearly all *shiméji* mushrooms sold in Japan today are *buna shiméji*, an easy to cultivate varietal. Like other cultivated fungi (such as slender, white *énokidaké*), *buna shiméji* are grown in clusters in squat jars. At market, the unattractive sponge-like material on which the mushrooms are grown is hidden from view with opaque packaging. When ready to use, open the package, trim away the moldy-looking section of the stems and, if necessary, rinse the caps briefly under cold running water. Gently shake or squeeze dry. With your hands, separate into small clusters.



舞茸

Maitaké
hen-of-the-woods
(*Grifola frondosa*)

If you're using beige-gray, ruffled *maitaké* (sometimes called "hen-of-the-woods" though the name in Japanese is written with calligraphy for "dancing" and "fungi") trim away any moldy parts of the white stems and, with your hands, separate clusters, lengthwise into thin strips (as though you were stringing string-cheese). The irregular surface that results from hand-tearing mushrooms will make them more flavorful than knife-sliced ones. *Maitaké* are extremely flavorful but tend to darken and "stain" the cooking broth that results from cooking them.

Making *neri miso*...

Seasoned *miso* sauces are referred to collectively as *neri miso*, or "stirred bean paste." Among the many *neri miso* pastes commonly used to prepare *washoku* dishes, a pungent red is the most versatile. This sauce can be made with any *aka miso* ("red" fermented bean paste). The consistency and saltiness of *miso* vary considerably from type to type and brand to brand. That's why I've given you a range, rather than exact measurements, for quantities of ingredients such as sugar, rice wine, and water. Begin with the least amount called for in the recipe below, adjusting later for sweet/salty balance and to achieve the proper consistency.



Sendai Miso 仙台味噌 (left)

Pungent Red Miso Sauce Aka Neri Miso
赤練り味噌 (right)

Makes about 1/2 cup sauce.

- 5 to 6 tablespoons *Sendai miso* or other pungent *aka miso* ("red" bean paste)
- 2 to 3 tablespoons sugar
- 2 to 3 tablespoons *sake* (rice wine)
- 1 to 2 tablespoons water

Combine the ingredients directly in the pan in which the sauce will be made. Before placing the pan over your source of heat, stir ingredients with a wooden spatula until they are thoroughly mixed.

Cook, stirring constantly, over medium-high heat until the mixture is glossy and the consistency of tomato ketchup. (The sauce will stiffen and thicken a bit as it cools.) The sauce will bubble and splatter as you cook, so use caution, and long-handled pans and spatulas.

Use a spoon to take a small sample from the pot. Allow the sample to cool before tasting. Adjust, as needed, by adding more sugar (if too salty) and/or water (if too stiff). Set aside to cool completely. Transfer the cooked and cooled sauce to a glass jar with a tight-fitting lid. Refrigerated, it will keep 3 to 4 weeks.