Adapted by the author from WASHOKU: Recipes from the Japanese Home Kitchen
(Ten Speed Press 2005)

Kelp and Mushroom Relish
Tsukudani Kombu

佃煮



During the Edo period (1603-1868), the fish market serving the area now known as Tokyo, was located in Tsukuda. There, small and bruised fish with little or no commercial value, were preserved by simmering them in a mixture of soy sauce and *mirin* (syrupy rice wine). Huge vats of seasoned soy were re-used, becoming more intense with each new batch of fish simmered in it. When necessary, the soy sauce mixture was thinned with water. In the households of those who worked at the market, kitchen scraps and bits and pieces of kelp, fish flakes, and dried mushrooms left from making stock were re-cycled in a process of soy-stewing that came to be known as *Tsukuda ni*, or "simmered in the manner of Tsukuda."

In today's frugal *washoku* kitchen, pieces of *kombu,* that remain after making stock are transformed, *Tsukuda ni* style, into relish to be served with rice, or used to stuff hand-pressed rice triangles. I store my leftover *kombu* in a small, lidded container in the refrigerator. As it fills up, the lid becomes harder to close, signaling its time to a batch of *tsukudan ni* relish. If at any point the *kombu* develops a sticky, pasty, whitish substance on the surface, I discard it.

Makes about 1/2 cup

5 or 6 strips of *kombu* (kelp), about 50 square inches total, left over from *dashi*-making
2 cups cold water
3 tablespoons rice vinegar (*su*)
1 teaspoon sugar
1 teaspoon *saké* (Japanese rice wine)
3 tablespoons *mirin* (syrupy rice wine)
4 to 5 tablespoons soy sauce (*shōyu*)
1 package *énokidaké* (slender-stalked, ivory-colored mushrooms with small button caps), trimmed into 1-inch lengths AND/OR softened *shiitaké* mushrooms

Slice the *kombu* into julienne strips 1 to 1&1/2 inches long or small 1/2inch squares . In a non-reactive pot (enamel, glass, or lined with non-stick coating), bring 2 cups of water to a rolling boil. Adding the vinegar to the water helps to tenderize the *kombu*, and when using left over *kombu*, the vinegar eliminates any questionable bacteria.

Reduce the heat to maintain a steady, though not vigorous, boil, and cook the *kombu* strips for 5 to 6 minutes. The water may become murky with a green cast to it and/or the surface of the *kombu* may begin to blister – this is entirely normal. Test for tenderness with your fingernail; it should leave a mark easily. If necessary, continue cooking for another 2 to 3 minutes.

Drain; rinse in cold water; drain again.

© 2016 Copyright. All rights reserved by Elizabeth Andoh



Rinse and dry your saucepan; add sugar, *saké, mirin,* and *shōyu.* Over low heat, bring the mixture to a simmer; return the parboiled *kombu* strips. Simmer for 2 to 3 minutes.



If you're using cultivated, ivory-colored, slender-stalked, small-capped *énokidaké*, remove them from their plastic bag, rinse the heads under cold running water, and shake them dry. Trim away the spongy (moldy-looking) bottom half. The remaining stalks can be left as is, or cut into short lengths. The bottom parts require longer cooking than the caps portion.

Accordingly, add the bottom half of the *énokidaké* and simmer for 3 or 4 minutes. Then add the tops and cook for an additional 3 or 4 minutes (if using softened *shiitaké* caps cook them for a full 8 to 10 minutes). Once all mushroom pieces have been added and had a chance to simmer with the kombu, cook all over fairly low heat for about 3 minutes, stirring frequently. (The liquid will become very foamy as it reduces rapidly; be careful not to let it scorch).



When soy-stewing *kombu*, it is best to use an *otoshi-buta* (wooden dropped lid, above center photo) and/or a sheet of cooking parchment (cut in a circle slightly smaller in circumference than the pot so that the sheet sits directly on the food, not on the rim of the pot) to keep the *kombu* covered as it cooks.

When the *kombu* looks glazed, and the liquid is nearly gone, remove the pan from the heat and let the *kombu* and *énokidaké* cool to room temperature. Store extra *Kombu no Tsukuda Ni* in a glass jar in the refrigerator for up to two weeks. Each time you take some relish from the jar, reseal it with fresh plastic wrap before replacing the lid.

© 2016 Copyright. All rights reserved by Elizabeth Andoh