

Cherished Recipes From the Chiba Family

From Roo Heins

Dashi

This is the classic Japanese soup base, also used in other simmered dishes. For a vegan version, add a couple dried shiitake mushrooms to the water with the kombu and omit the bonito flakes. You can “cold steep” the kombu (and dried mushrooms, if using) overnight before making the dashi for a deeper flavor. Or if you’re lazy, you can just use a couple “dashi packs” (they’re like teabags with dashi ingredients inside).

Yield: 4 cups

- 4 cups filtered water
- One 4-in square kombu seaweed
- 2 fistfuls *katsuobushi* bonito flakes

Combine the water and kombu in a covered saucepan and place over medium-low heat. Allow to come to a bare simmer (where bubbles are just coming up from the bottom of the pan). Turn heat to very low and let stand for 15 minutes (make sure it doesn’t boil!), then remove from heat and add the bonito flakes. Cover and let stand for 15 minutes, then strain. The kombu and bonito flakes can be re-steeped in 3 cups of fresh water to make a second stock, but the flavor will be inferior.

Miso Soup

Mrs. Chiba taught me to make miso soup, and then Sensei taught me to make it how he liked it (with more miso). A classic miso soup only uses tofu. Miyamoto Sensei is particularly fond of the version below.

I remember one time Chiba Sensei came to Tokyo after I’d been in Japan a few years, and he was staying at a hotel not far from our apartment. I knew he’d appreciate something home cooked, so I made him a jar of miso soup and rode over with it on my bike. I still remember how pleased he was to see it.

*A few key points with miso soup: Don’t try to put too many different things in. Just one or two focal ingredients—*tofu cubes, or little clams, mushrooms, greens, or leeks* are good. Also, never add the wakame and green onions to the main soup pot, as they will become slimy and lose their charm. Just put an appropriate amount in each individual bowl before ladling the soup over.*

Yield: 4 servings

- 4 cups dashi
- ½ yellow onion, sliced into ¼-inch wide crescents
- 1 yellow potato, cut into ½-inch chunks
- 2 abura-age (fried tofu) pouches, rinsed in boiling water and drained well (if you can’t find abura-age, use ½ package medium-firm tofu, cut into ½-inch cubes)
- 4 tablespoons (or to taste) red miso paste
- 1 tablespoon dried cut wakame, soaked in ½ cup cold water
- 3 green onions, thinly sliced

Combine the dashi, onion, and potato in a saucepan over medium heat. Bring to a boil and allow to cook until the potatoes are just soft. Meanwhile, slice the abura-age into strips and add when the potatoes are soft. Drain the wakame.

In a measuring cup or small bowl, combine the miso with ½ cup of the hot dashi and stir well to remove lumps. Take the saucepan off the heat and add the miso, stirring well to blend.

Put about a tablespoon each of wakame and green onions into each person’s bowl and ladle the miso soup over. Serve immediately.

Okayu (Rice Gruel)

Anyone who sat sesshin at San Diego Aikikai would have had this for breakfast (minus the salmon, of course). Water can be used in place of the dashi, but the flavor will be a bit thinner. Sensei liked to add chunks of sweet potato about halfway through cooking. You can add greens or any other vegetable, and top with gomashio (roasted sesame seeds and salt) instead of umeboshi if you like. My favorite addition is to beat an egg and stir it into the hot okayu just before serving.

Yield: 4 servings

- 4 cups dashi or water
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup medium-grain brown rice (sushi rice or similar)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon good salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup smoked salmon, cooked chicken, or other protein such as smoked tofu
- 4 green onions, thinly sliced
- 4 umeboshi pickled plums (optional)

Wash the rice until the water runs clear; drain. Let stand for 15 to 30 minutes, then combine rice, dashi and salt in a heavy-bottomed pot or *donabe* clay pot over medium heat. Bring to a boil, then lower heat and allow to simmer, partially covered, for an hour or until the rice becomes thick. Stir every so often to keep from sticking. Just before serving, stir in the salmon. Ladle into bowls and top each serving with sliced green onions and an umeboshi plum, if you enjoy umeboshi.