

## Japan: The Vegetarian Cookbook

**Nancy Singleton Hachisu**

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Despite being known as the home of sushi and ramen, Japan has a long history of vegetable-forward dishes, and Nancy Singleton Hachisu's *Japan: The Vegetarian Cookbook* is a beautiful celebration of its vegetarian cooking.

An American who has lived in Japan for over thirty years, Hachisu writes with expertise about historical and modern facets of Japanese cooking. Many foods and cooking techniques entered Japan from China in the 1100s-1300s, and both Buddhism and Shinto have complex attitudes toward food. Hachisu shares this history in her introduction and continues to sprinkle facts and context throughout her book, examining the origins of vinegar and recounting a visit to a mirin brewery.

Based on the principles of simplicity that permeate Japanese cooking, these recipes are inviting; most do not exceed a dozen ingredients. The section on building a bowl of miso includes seasonal suggestions for foods to put in and on the soup, leading to a customizable experience; asparagus might top a bowl in the springtime, while winter might see a miso soup featuring napa cabbage and enoki mushrooms.

From pickles to rice to steamed dishes, the selection is wide and varied. Okayu rice porridge promises comfort in a bowl, and spicy daikon radish is incarnated as a stock base, in sun-dried strips, and as a raw salad ingredient. Hachisu suggests substitutions for ingredients that are difficult to source outside of Japan, and ingredients are separated by type (seven types of seaweed; five types of rice; three types of millet) in the glossary. Konbu seaweed provides the base for dashi soup stock, but shiitake mushrooms or vegetable peels can also be swapped in to create the savory flavors that make these vegetarian dishes distinctive.

*Japan: The Vegetarian Cookbook* is a delightful, spare, and alluring cookbook that gets at the heart of Japanese cooking.

JEANA JORGENSEN (May / June 2023)

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