

Japanese Home Cooking: Simple Meals, Authentic Flavors

Sonoko Sakai

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For the handful of centuries that Japan has been on the minds of westerners, the country has exemplified the mysteries of the East. The island nation's unique geology, climate, rich waters, and isolation led to a culture, a civilization, more unusual and refined than any on Earth. Viewed from afar, the Japanese seem to have a ritual or ceremony for nearly all aspects of life, though especially the preparation and serving of food—a fact that can be intimidating to foreigners interested in the country's healthy cuisine.

But in *Japanese Home Cooking*, Sonoko Sakai makes the case that what happens in the average Japanese home on a daily basis is anything but complicated. With warmth and patience, she demystifies the unfamiliar staple foods—seaweed, pickled plums, bonito flakes, dried sardines, and shiitake mushrooms—that stock the typical Japanese pantry. She shows how basics like dashi (broth) or *shoyu tare* (soy-sauce based seasoning) serve as the foundations of countless recipes, devoting a good third of the book to explaining the preparation of the fundamental components of Japanese cooking.

In part two, Sakai lets fly 100 plus recipes from the panoply of Japanese comfort food, most utilizing easy-to-find, nutritious ingredients. From breakfast dishes like *ojiya*, an oat porridge with kabocha squash and ginger, and homemade yogurt with sweetened black soybeans, to *goya champuru* (a scramble of bitter melon, pork, and tofu), to *okonomiyaki* (pancakes with bonito flakes), the dishes are both inviting and soul satisfying.

Beautifully photographed and filled with stories of food suppliers in Japan and California, *Japanese Home Cooking* is a thrilling introduction to the essence and essentials of Japanese cooking.

MATT SUTHERLAND (January / February 2020)

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