

Vegan Recipes from Japan

Malte Härtig

Jule Felice Frommelt, Photographer

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Informed by Kaiseki cuisine and Zen Buddhism, Malte Härtig's *Vegan Recipes from Japan* is an elegant cookbook that reveres cooking rituals.

Härtig writes: "Cooking with love. That's the essence." For him, minimalism is key in recipes that bring forth how things "are already *what* they are and *the way* they are." Here, for instance, clear broth is "enveloped in the fullness of nothingness." But this philosophical outlook is far from esoteric: it's rooted in pairing a few choice ingredients, treating them with a delicate hand, and showing humble understanding of how one can make the best of available produce.

In the book's four seasonal sections, tranquil comments introduce small portion dishes that can be enjoyed alone or as accompaniments. Artful photographs emphasize simple plating and soothing ceramics. From interpretations of the classics, including tempuras, tsukemono, and miso soups, to fresh twists, such as beans and radishes with dill and Japanese antipasti, the dishes are vibrant. They also reflect Härtig and gardener and photographer Jule Felice Frommelt's spontaneity: they were cooked on a Spree Forest island property.

For both creators, cooking is meditative and aesthetic. A nasturtium stands out in Sesame Tofu, Nasturtium, and Ponzu. Matcha-flavored shaved ice is brilliant green. A trio of pears reflect autumn in the playful The Pear as a Pear dessert recipe. The volume encourages creativity while staying true to a Japanese less-is-more approach that underscores natural flavors. The result is an intriguing blend of cultures, in which cape gooseberries are at home with tofu.

A practical side-by-side layout of photographs and recipes, tips about cooking rice and other methods, and a handy glossary add up to a gift that's as beautiful to browse as it is easy to follow. *Vegan Recipes from Japan* is a refreshing, healthy, and inspirational cookbook.

KAREN RIGBY (January / February 2021)

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