

DEEPLY REGIONAL JAPAN[®]

SWEET POTATO, CHICKPEA AND WALNUT PUDDING SLICE

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Sweet potato, beans and peas are ingredients that widely used in traditional Japanese sweets. They often play a similar role to flour in many Western-style sweets, in providing bulk and starchiness. The Japanese tend to prefer sticky, soft and moist textures in food, which is another reason for the popularity of these ingredients—together with others such as glutinous (‘mochi’ or ‘sticky’) rice and buckwheat—in traditional Japanese cooking, both sweet and savoury.

This recipe combines several classic Japanese ingredients in what is essentially a buckwheat ‘mochi’—a rustic and old-fashioned traditional Japanese dessert popular in the countryside. For the ‘bean and pea’ component, I have used chickpeas instead of the usual adzuki beans etc—chickpeas are not a traditional Japanese ingredient, however, has a wonderful nutty taste and texture that surprisingly go well in Japanese traditional sweets.

The slice is versatile in that it can be served chilled or warm, and can also be served as part of a Western-style dessert with ice-cream, fruit and so on. For a twist, briefly bake the slice in a lightly greased pan or place under a grill to get a browned crust—which provides an extra textural dimension to the dessert.

INGREDIENTS

- Sweet potato, steamed peeled and mashed (only use ‘floury’ varieties with reddish purple or white skins) c. 500 g
- Boiled chickpeas (or adzuki beans or black turtle beans; see separate recipe for how to prepare them from dry beans) 1 cup
- Walnuts, soaked and chopped 1 cup
- Rice bran ½ cup
- Raw or brown sugar ½ cup or to taste
- Buckwheat flour ¼ cup
- Whole egg, beaten 1 medium-sized
- Water ½ cup
- OPTIONAL: Cinnamon (or allspice, cardamom, or a combination of these) 1 level teaspoon
- OPTIONAL: Soy sauce or tamari 1 level teaspoon

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Note that the boiled chickpeas (or other beans) require preparation in advance. See the separate recipe for ‘Boiling adzuki and other beans’ for details.



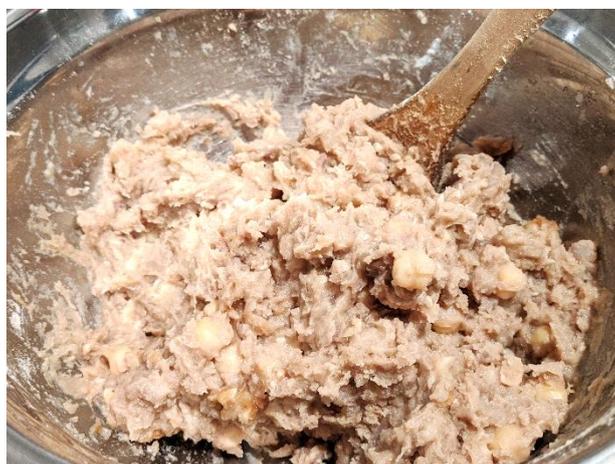
2. If steaming the sweet potatoes from scratch, steam them unpeeled, and whole if possible—cut in half if absolutely necessary, but avoid cutting into smaller pieces. Steam on medium–high heat for 30 to 45 minutes, turning them over half-way for even steaming. Test with a thin bamboo skewer to see if cooked through to the middle (the skewer should pass through without any resistance). When fully cooked, remove from the heat and allow to cool sufficiently for handling (keep the lid on during cooling, so this may take a while).



3. Peel the steamed sweet potatoes. Remove also any woody or hard parts in the flesh. Slice crosswise across the fibres, then mash the flesh coarsely. Add the sugar and continue mashing to an even and smooth texture.



4. Add the buckwheat flour, boiled chickpeas, rice bran, chopped walnut, beaten egg, and the optional ingredients. Mix thoroughly, taking care to eliminate all lumps of flour and bran.
5. Add the water incrementally, mixing continually until a sticky and wet dough forms. The dough should be stiff enough for a spatula to stand in it without falling over. Take care not to add too much water or else the slice will not set. (Adjust with additional buckwheat flour and/or rice bran if the dough has become too loose.)



6. Line a heat-resistant mould for steaming with baking paper to prevent sticking. If using a smooth-surfaced mould (e.g. Pyrex glass), simply wetting the inside surfaces with water may be enough. Transfer the thickened mixture into the mould and smoothen the top with a spatula or similar. Cover the top with a sheet of baking paper, making it stick tightly to the surface of the mixture. Steam on medium–high heat for c. 30 minutes until set. Remove from the heat and allow to cool to room temperature.



7. Cover with a solid lid, plastic food wrap or aluminium foil, and place in the fridge to stiffen sufficiently for easy cutting.
8. Cut into small squares or rectangles using a moistened knife. Serve on its own or as part of a dessert, e.g. with fruit. Your slice should keep in the refrigerator for 3 to 4 days—use a storage container with a lid to prevent drying out, and tip out any water that oozes out of the slice during storage.