

DEEPLY REGIONAL JAPAN®

ADZUKI AND SWEET POTATO MOCHI

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Sweet varieties of mochi, the Japanese sticky rice cakes, have recently become popular around the world. There is something satisfying about the softness and stickiness of mochi, which many have become hooked on.

Most types of mochi can be made in the home kitchen. However, those that are made from pounded glutinous (sticky) rice can be time consuming to make. Varieties using rice flour are less involved to prepare, but it can sometimes be a little tricky to get the right consistency of the dough.

This simple recipe is for a sweet mochi made from glutinous rice flour, which I came up with after ending up with some left-over steamed sweet potato and boiled adzuki beans. The addition of tapioca starch is not a traditional technique, but does make the mochi remain soft and sticky even when refrigerated.

The recipe results in a texture that is very soft and sticky, so dusting with kinako, the roasted soy bean powder, makes it easier to handle—and less messy to eat! Kinako has an earthy, nutty aroma that complements the other flavours in the mochi. Kinako may be hard to obtain outside of Japan, and I have found lightly toasted fine rice bran a reasonable substitute. You can also try to use finely ground toasted sesame seeds, almond meal or dessicated coconut, however, the flavour will be different from kinako.

The optional addition of spices such as ground cinnamon or cardamom, or a pinch of salt, will provide further interest to the flavours.

INGREDIENTS

- Boiled adzuki beans (see separate recipe on how to boil dry beans; alternatively use canned beans) 2 cups
- Sweet potato, steamed and mashed (only use 'floury' varieties with reddish purple or white skins) 1 cup
- Glutinous rice flour 1½ cup
- Tapioca starch ½ cup
- Sugar ½ cup
- Water ¼ to 1½ cups (adjust according to the moisture content of your mashed sweet potato and boiled adzuki beans)
- Kinako (roasted soybean powder) or substitute of your choice Enough to evenly coat each piece of mochi
- OPTIONAL: ground cinnamon, ground cardamom, salt To taste

INSTRUCTIONS

1. 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).



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



3. In a bowl, combine the glutinous rice flour, tapioca starch, sugar, and any optional ingredient of your choice. Mix well, then add the mashed sweet potato and boiled adzuki beans. Mix well, then incrementally add water, stirring continually to a smooth consistency. The 'dough' mixture at this stage should be quite runny, like a sauce.



4. Transfer the mixture to a saucepan and place on low–medium heat. Stir frequently to prevent burning. When the mixture starts to stiffen, stir vigorously and continually to prevent lumps from forming. Remove from the heat when the dough has stiffened so that a spoon will stand in it without falling over, but is still wet and sticky.



5. Transfer the dough immediately to a moistened heat-resistant mould for steaming. You may wish to line the mould with baking paper, if you are going to transfer the mochi after steaming to another container (or simply eating the whole lot on the day!). Use a spatula or

similar to help spread the dough into the mould and exclude air pockets. Smooth the top of the dough to a flat, even surface, then seal with a sheet of baking paper.



6. Steam the dough on medium–high heat for c. 30 minutes. Remove from the heat and allow to cool, covered with a lid.
7. Once cool, place in the refrigerator to fully set the mochi. Once set, cut the mochi block into small rectangles or squares 3–5 cm in size; moisten the knife blade first before cutting to prevent the sticky mochi from clinging to the blade. Dust each piece with kinako (or substitute). Serve immediately—simply accompanied with green tea in the traditional Japanese way for your morning or afternoon tea, or as part of a dessert served together with seasonal fruit, ice cream and so on.



8. If not consuming immediately, wrap the steamed mochi block with a sheet of baking paper, then tightly wrap it with a plastic food wrap. Store in the refrigerator, where it should keep for about 3 days. Cut into pieces as required and dust with kinako (or substitute) just before serving.