

DEEPLY REGIONAL JAPAN®

‘ITAMENI’ OF BEETROOT, BLACK BEAN AND HIJIKI

13 June 2020



Served with boiled udon noodles

‘Itameni’ is a type of ‘nimono’ or stewed dish in Japanese cooking, whereby the ingredients are lightly stir-fried before being stewed, i.e. braising. It is a technique often applied to vegetable side-dishes, where a stronger flavour is called for than simply stewing the ingredients.

Japanese cuisine makes use of more dark-coloured ingredients than most food traditions around the world. Think of all the seaweeds such as konbu, wakame and hijiki, ‘kuromame’ or black soybeans, black sesame seeds, black rice vinegar, and so on. Beetroot is not a traditional Japanese ingredient (even today, it is regarded with curiosity and suspicion by some...), however, its deep red colour—at least in my personal opinion—pairs well with the dark-coloured traditional Japanese ingredients, providing visual drama in the dishes.

In this adventurous spirit, I have come up with this simple itameni recipe combining the glorious colours of beetroot, black beans and hijiki. The addition of katsuobushi really lifts the flavours with its umami, however, leave it out if you would like a completely vegetarian dish—an alternative in this case would also be to replace the water with konbu dashi liquid, or to add some red miso, both of which are packed with umami.

INGREDIENTS (as a small side dish for 3 to 4 persons)

- Black soybeans or black turtle beans, boiled (see separate recipe for how to prepare black turtle beans from dry beans) 1 cup
- Beetroot c. 1 medium-sized (about the same volume as the blackbeans when diced)
- Dried hijiki seaweed 1 level tablespoon (dry)
- Shallot/spring onion/leek leaves and stems c. 1 medium-sized stem and leaves (about the same volume as the blackbeans when sliced)
- Red capsicum c. 1 small to medium-sized (about the same volume as the blackbeans when diced)
- Katsuobushi (smoked bonito flakes), finely crushed 1 level tablespoon
- Japanese soy sauce or tamari 2 level tablespoons or to taste
- Mirin 2 level tablespoons
- Japanese sake or semi-dry white wine 2 level tablespoons
- Water 2 level tablespoons
- Roasted sesame oil 1 level tablespoon

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Boil the beans at least a day in advance. See separate recipe for detailed instruction on how to prepare the dry beans the Japanese way.
2. Soak the dried hijiki in cold water until supple. Take care not to soak for longer than necessary otherwise the hijiki will become soggy when cooked. Drain and resoak in water for a further minute or two, drain again and wash under running cold water. If there are pieces of stem longer than c. 2 cm, cut them to size. Set aside.
3. Prepare the vegetables. Dice the beetroot and red capsicum c. 1 cm across. Slice the shallot/spring onion/leek leaves and stems c. 3 mm wide. Set aside.
4. Heat the sesame oil in a saucepan over medium heat. When the oil has heated, add the diced beetroot and stir-fry for a minute or so. Then add the soy sauce/tamari, sake (or substitute), mirin (or substitute), katsuobushi, and water. Cover with a lid, lower the heat to low or low-medium, and simmer until the beetroot is starting to soften slightly—this may take 5 minutes or longer.



5. Add the boiled blackbeans and shallot/spring onion/leek and simmer further until the shallot/spring onion/leek are just starting to soften.



6. Add the diced red capsicum and simmer for another minute or so. Remove from the heat and stand covered with a lid for c. minutes. If desired, top with a garnish of your choice such as chopped flat-leaf parsley. Serve alongside other dishes as part of a meal menu. As an alternative, serve mixed with boiled and drained noodles such as udon—which results in a great visual effect as the colour of beetroot will tint the noodles purple-pink.

