

DEEPLY REGIONAL JAPAN®

‘SUĪTO-POTETO’: JAPANESE CREAMED SWEET POTATO CAKE

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‘Satsumaimo’, or sweet potatoes, are a popular ingredient in the Japanese cuisine. Since its introduction to Japan around 1600, it became widely grown—particularly from the 18th century onward when it was valued as emergency food during the recurrent famines (and most recently during World War II). The Japanese often use sweet potatoes in traditional confectionery, e.g. as a filling paste in mochi and manju, and as a flavouring agent in yokan. The custom has been adopted in more recent times to Western-style Japanese sweets. The ‘suito-poteto’ is one such recipe developed in the 1880s—the name is a transliteration of the English word ‘sweet potato’ and represents something of a misunderstanding of the word’s original meaning. The recipe is quite simple, essentially a sweet potato mash blended with milk or cream, butter, sugar and other flavourings and baked. The creamy, but subtle sweetness has made the suito-poteto a long-standing favourite among the Japanese. The reddish purple-skinned, yellow-fleshed sweet potato varieties that develop a chestnut-like flavour and texture when cooked are most commonly used. Recently, the purple-fleshed varieties have also become popular for the dramatic visual effect they bring.

Japanese patissiers take great care in making their suito-poteto, which is usually oven-baked. The sweet potato paste is passed through the very fine-meshed ‘uragoshi’ sieve for a silken smooth texture, and egg yolk glaze is applied to develop an appealing golden crust. Being a lazy cook, I present here a simplified version using the frying pan—an idea I came up with when I was faced with a need for a quick dessert solution at home and I had some left-over steamed sweet potatoes. The addition of egg white to the dough is optional; it results in a moister texture and better binding, especially if the sweet potatoes are dry and floury. If you like a rich and creamy suito-poteto, then increase the amounts of butter and cream, or their coconut equivalents.

INGREDIENTS

- Sweet potatoes (preferably yellow, white or purple-fleshed varieties) c. 600 g (approximately 2 medium-sized tubers)
- Raw sugar ¼ to ½ cup (c. 50 to 100 g)

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- Butter or organic virgin coconut oil ¼ cup (c. 40 to 60 g; adjust according to texture and preference)
- Cream or coconut cream 1 level tablespoon (adjust according to texture and preference)
- Egg yolk, whisked (add a little water if too thick and lumpy) Equivalent to 1 medium-sized egg
- OPTIONAL: Egg white, whisked Equivalent to 1 medium-sized egg (adjust according to texture and preference)
- OPTIONAL: Ground cinnamon, minced ginger, salt c. ¼ level teaspoon

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.



3. In a bowl, combine the sweet potato, sugar, cream/coconut cream, and any optional ingredient of your choice, and mash evenly to a smooth consistency. (If you would like a very smooth paste, first mash the sweet potato separately and pass the mash through a very

fine mesh sieve using a spatula—a technique called ‘uragoshi’ in Japanese cooking.) Adjust the amount of cream/coconut cream and egg white (optional) according to the consistency of the dough mixture and your preference; it should be moist and hold together, not sloppy or crumbly. Mix well and set aside.



4. In a small saucepan, warm the butter or coconut oil over very low heat until starting to soften or melt (take care not to overheat). Add to the dough mixture prepared previously and mix thoroughly. If you are adding the optional egg white, also add to the dough.



5. You can bake your dough as a rectangular slab 2 to 4 cm thick using a heat-resistant mould (e.g. a small brownie tin or Pyrex dish), or as a few ‘fingers’ tightly wrapped with baking paper.
6. **USING A MOULD:** Line the mould with a sheet of baking paper large enough to completely wrap the dough mixture from the base up the sides and across the top. Evenly brush the part of baking paper at the base of the mould with the whisked egg yolk. Place the dough in the lined mould, using a spatula (or similar) to spread it evenly into every corner and to smooth the top. Brush the top of the dough evenly with egg yolk, then cover with baking paper, pressing down gently so that it sticks to the upper surface of the dough. If required, use an additional sheet of baking paper to cover the dough completely.



7. BAKING AS 'FINGERS': Spread on a flat surface sheets of baking paper large enough to wrap each 'finger' or bar twice around. Evenly brush the baking paper with the whisked egg yolk. Fashion the dough into 'sausages' 3 to 4 cm in diameter and up to around 12 cm long (it will be difficult to handle if too long), then place on the baking paper. Wrap each 'finger' tightly with baking paper and fold or twist the baking paper to enclose the ends. Gently flatten the top and bottom sides of each finger to a slightly square or rectangular cross-section, so that the fingers do not roll around.



8. Bake slowly in a shallow pan over low heat. Cover with a lid if required to assist with retaining the heat. [NOTE: Do NOT place on too high heat as the egg yolk glaze will burn very easily.]



9. Monitor frequently to prevent burning. Once the base has baked to a golden brown colour (this should only take a few minutes with the egg yolk glaze), turn over to bake the other side. If baking in a mould, use a spatula and an inverted plate (or a similar arrangement) to assist in turning over. If the first side requires further baking, turn over again and return to the pan.
10. Remove from the heat when both sides are a golden brown colour. Allow to cool to room temperature before cutting to serve. If the texture is very soft, place in a refrigerator to firm up before cutting. Your suito-poteto will keep refrigerated for up to 3 days.



ADDITIONAL NOTES:

- If you would like to try baking your suito-poteto in the classic way, shape them into small individual pieces according to your liking, e.g. diamonds, domes, squares. Place the pieces on an oven tray with a sheet of baking paper, or in individual foil cake cups. Bake in an oven pre-heated to c. 200° C until the egg yolk glaze turns golden brown.
- If using sweet potatoes with dark purple flesh, the egg yolk glaze will turn an unattractive brown-grey colour when baked. In this case, you can simply leave out the glaze, but be careful not to burn the dough which can blacken quickly with its sugar content. If using a mould, and would like to protect the dough from burning, evenly lay down a thin (c. 1 mm) layer of flour on the baking paper and over the top of the dough. Bake both sides until the

flour is starting to lightly brown. Remove the flour crust which should easily peel off (and will be a little burnt on the inside, curiously) before serving.



- Instead of an oven, you can also use a toaster oven or a grill to bake your suito-poteto.



Suito-poteto finger using 'Hawaiian Sunshine' sweet potato variety