

DEEPLY REGIONAL JAPAN®

‘KOSHI-AN’: SWEET ADZUKI BEAN PASTE (SMOOTH)

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‘Koshi-an’ is the smooth version of the sweet adzuki or white bean paste that is used widely in traditional Japanese confectionery such as filled mochi (sticky rice cake) and manjū. The initial steps in making koshi-an are essentially the same as for ‘tsubu-an’, the coarse sweet bean paste. The major difference is that the paste is passed through a very fine-meshed sieve to remove all skin fragments—a process called ‘uragoshi’ in Japanese—for a silken-smooth texture that is more refined than the rustic granular texture of tsubu-an.

The Japanese take great care in preparing koshi-an to achieve the finest texture possible. The recipe here is a simplified version that is not as involved as the traditional recipe. The uragoshi step does take quite a lot of persistence, so if you are in a hurry, you can alternatively use a food processor to finely blend the whole paste with the skin fragments still in—bearing in mind that the final texture will not be completely smooth as in the sieved version.

INGREDIENTS

- Dry adzuki beans, washed and soaked overnight to rehydrate 1 cup (dry)
- Sugar ½ to ¾ cup or to taste
- Salt (optional) c. 1 level teaspoon in total
- Water As required

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Wash the beans well to remove dirt and other residues. Soak in plenty of cold water for at least 6 hours or until the beans have fully absorbed moisture. Do not oversoak, however, as the beans may start to break apart.
2. Drain the rehydrated adzuki beans and rinse under running water. Place in saucepan, add about half a level teaspoon of salt and just cover with water. Bring to the boil on medium heat. Skim off and discard the froth that floats to the surface. Repeat this several times until very little further frothing occurs, then tip out most of the water carefully.



3. Refill the saucepan with warm water so that the adzuki beans are just covered, and add another half a teaspoon of salt. Bring again to the boil over medium heat, then drop the heat to low and gently boil or simmer Stir gently from time to time for even cooking. With soaking and pre-boiling, the beans will not take very long to cook, so monitor regularly.
4. Remove from the heat once the beans are fully cooked—i.e. soft with no hard core remaining, but not falling apart. Drain off any excess liquid using a sieve or colander.



1. Place the drained beans back in the saucepan. Add the sugar and sufficient water to just cover the cooked beans. Simmer covered with a lid on low–medium heat, stirring frequently to prevent burning (which can happen easily), and to work the liquid that has separated back into the paste. Cook until many of the beans are starting to fall apart to form a paste. If all the water gets absorbed by the beans before this stage, add more water.
2. Remove from the heat and allow to cool for handling (do not allow to go completely cold). Using a masher or spoon, mash the remaining beans in the paste as finely as possible.



3. Transfer the paste into a fine-meshed sieve (the Japanese ‘uragoshi’ sieve would be the best, but any very fine meshed sieve would be OK). Using a smearing action with a spoon, pass the paste through the sieve over a bowl. Moisten the paste with a little warm water from time to time to assist sieving. The process may take some persistence and strength, especially if there are many coarse fragments.



4. Once you have finished sieving, scrape off any paste attached to the bottom of the sieve into the bowl. [The coarse fragments sieved out of the paste are full of nutrition, and should be used in your cooking wherever possible. See note at the end.] Transfer the sieved paste into a small saucepan. Place over low heat and slowly evaporate off excess moisture, stirring continually to prevent burning (which easily happens due to the sugar content of the paste).



5. When the paste has thickened to a consistency similar to that of miso paste, remove from the heat and allow to cool to room temperature. Your koshi-an is ready to use!



6. If not using right away, store your paste in a sealed container in the refrigerator. The paste should keep for about a week if properly stored. If the paste dries out or hardens during storage, place in a saucepan with a little water and stir over low heat to refresh the paste. The paste will also freeze well for a short period (generally up to about two weeks), but avoid longer storage as the moisture will separate out of the paste.

CHEF'S NOTES: The coarse bean fragments sieved out of the paste during the 'uragoshi' process is full of nutrition, including polyphenols—with their potent anti-oxidant and anti-aging properties—and dietary fibre. As such, these 'residues' should be recycled into your cooking if possible. It can be worked into flours and starches (including potato/sweet potato mash) in sweet or savoury recipes. It can also be blended for use in sauces and dressings. It is really up to your imagination, so please experiment!