

# DEEPLY REGIONAL JAPAN®

## ‘BANCHA-NI’ AND ‘KŌCHA-NI’: MEAT STEWED IN TEA

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*Beef stewed in black tea, marinated in soy sauce, sake, mirin and rice vinegar*

Stewing in bancha, the Japanese brown tea, is an old-fashioned Japanese home-cooking technique that is not often seen today. Tea has a tenderising effect on the ingredients—a classic Japanese recipe is octopus slow-simmered in bancha, an ingredient notorious for becoming tough when cooked. It is also traditionally used with oily blue-skinned fish such as mackerel, as tea neutralises the ‘fishy’ aroma and taste. In modern Japanese cooking, both bancha and black tea (‘kōcha’ in Japanese) are used with meats—the tea cuts through any unpleasant fattiness that the meat may have, as well as transforming tough cuts into a ‘melt-in-your-mouth’ experience.

Here is a simple recipe that can be applied to pork, beef or chicken. The technique is useful if you have a block of meat that you would like to enjoy over several meals, as the tea also has a preserving effect. The marinade is based on a classic Japanese favourite, but feel free to vary it or use another sauce of your choice. Alternatively, use the stewed meat without the marinade as an ingredient in your stir-fries, stewed dishes, fried rice, noodles, salads, and even as a sandwich filling. See my recipes for ‘**Karē-raisu**’ (Japanese curry with rice) and

‘**Amakara-ni**’ (Sweet-salty stewed) of beef for examples of ways to use your tea-stewed meat. Also, the tea solution used to stew your meat is full of the meat’s umami, and can be used as stock (with an interesting ‘herbal’ note from the tea leaves) in soups, noodle broths and stewed dishes—see the recipe for ‘**Noodles in beef and tea broth**’ at the end of this recipe.

## INGREDIENTS

### Meat

- Block of pork or beef suitable for stewing, or chicken thigh or breast fillet c. 500 g
- Salt As required to lightly rub all surfaces of the block of meat
- Bancha or black tea leaves 1 to 2 level tablespoons
- Water c. 1 litre or as required (must just cover the block of meat; adjust if necessary and add extra tea leaves if adding more water)

### Marinade

- Japanese sake (or vodka, medium sherry, semi-sweet wine) 2 level tablespoons
- Mirin (or sweet sherry, sweet white wine) 2 level tablespoons
- Soy sauce or tamari 2 level tablespoons or to taste
- Rice vinegar (or other mild vinegar, e.g. balsamic, apple cider) 1 level tablespoon
- Water c. ¼ cup (adjust as required)
- Ginger root, very finely chopped or minced 1 level teaspoon
- Shallot, spring onion or leek leaves and stems, very finely chopped 1 level tablespoon
- OPTIONAL: Sugar 1 level teaspoon or to taste
- OPTIONAL: Chilli, finely chopped To taste

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Lightly sprinkle salt on all surfaces of the meat and rub. Stand for a few minutes.



2. Place the meat in a saucepan with tea leaves and water, ensuring that the water covers the meat. Cover with a lid, place on medium heat and bring to the boil. Once boiling, lower the heat and simmer for 30 minutes to 1 hour (depending on your ingredient). Turn the meat over during simmering for even cooking.



3. Remove from the heat and stand covered with a lid until it has cooled sufficiently for handling. Once cool, remove from the liquid and slice or cut to serving size. [Retain the simmering broth, which has the umami of the meat infused throughout, for use as stock in your cooking. See an example at the end of this recipe.]



4. Prepare the marinade by combining sake (or substitute), mirin (or substitute), soy sauce/tamari, vinegar, ginger and shallot/spring onion/leek in a small saucepan. Place over medium heat and bring to the boil. Once boiling, lower the heat and gently boil for c. 2 minutes. Remove from the heat and pour over the sliced or cut meat prepared previously. Alternatively, skip the marinade and use the meat in your cooking with other flavouring agents of your choice.



5. If not enjoying straight away, store your cooked meat in a sealable container in the refrigerator, where it will keep for around a week.



*Beef stewed in black tea, topped with 'kanzuri' (aged fermented chilli sauce) and served with buckwheat flat-bread and homemade sauerkraut*

## A RECIPE FOR USING THE LEFT-OVER BROTH FROM SIMMERING YOUR MEAT: NOODLES IN BEEF AND TEA BROTH



### Ingredients (for 2 persons)

- Japanese-style noodles of your choice (e.g. udon, soba, ramen) c. 200 g (dry)
- Roasted sesame oil 1 level tablespoon
- Leek or onion, finely chopped c. ½ cup
- Vegetables suitable for quick stewing (e.g. carrot, daikon, celery, beet leaves), chopped or sliced A small handful
- Broth from stewing the meat c. 2 cups (500 ml)
- Soy sauce or tamari 2 level tablespoons or to taste
- Japanese sake (or vodka, semi-sweet to sweet white or light red wine, medium to sweet sherry) 2 level tablespoons
- Sugar 1 level teaspoon or to taste
- OPTIONAL: Meat stewed in tea 2 to 4 small slices (1 to 2 slices per person)
- OPTIONAL CONDIMENTS: Shichimi (Japanese seven-spice chilli powder), chilli flakes or chopped fresh chilli, ground black pepper, roasted white sesame seeds As required

**Instructions:**

1. Boil the noodles according to instructions. Drain, refresh under cold running water, and set aside.
2. In a saucepan, heat the sesame oil over medium heat. Add the leek/onion and stir-fry until starting to soften.
3. Add the broth, soy sauce/tamari, sake (or substitute), and sugar. Bring to the boil, then add the vegetables. Lower the heat and simmer for a few minutes until the vegetables are starting to soften. Skim off any froth that floats to the surface.
4. Remove from the heat. Warm the noodles prepared at Step 1 by washing briefly with hot water, then place them in individual noodle bowls. Pour the broth with vegetables prepared at Step 3 over the noodles in each bowl. Place the optional sliced meat on top plus any garnish. Sprinkle with condiments of your choice. Enjoy immediately.