

New Year Ozoni Soup

For Japanese families New Year's morning is very important as it sets the family on its path for the rest of the year. The offering of Ozoni soup and the sharing of it on the morning of New Year's Day is a tradition which is said to have begun in the Muromachi Period (1333-1573).

This is one recipe of the many Ozoni soup types eaten at the New Year in Japan. Broadly, there are the clear broth types and the miso types. The broth ozoni soups are eaten in the Kanto area which includes Tokyo. Miso types are eaten in the Kansai areas of Japan, in Kyoto and Osaka. The shape of the mochi, round or square, added to the soup also varies by area.

Kagami Kai's members are from many different areas of Japan and each family has their own household recipe, but since Tetsu Takatani, Kagami Kai's chairman is from Kyoto, we offer this simple miso version that his mother made as he grew up.

Kyoto Style Ozoni

Serves four.

Ingredients

Dashi (soup broth)

Carrot (choose one which is nice and full around)

Daikon (Japanese radish about 2-3 inches in length)

Sato Imo (4 small potatoes)

Spinach (1 small bunch)

White miso (2-3 large tablespoons or to taste)

Mochi (4-8 round)

Hanakatsuo (shaved bonito flakes)

Instructions

Dashi can be made in several ways. Start with 4-5 cups of water in a saucepan. Traditionally, a 2-3 inch piece of konbu (dried kelp) is placed in the water and soaked overnight. At a minimum, soak it for at least an hour. Hanakatsuo dashi is also used traditionally but not necessary.

Nowadays, additional options to make dashi are available as packets of dashi which look like a teabag, or a powder that can be added to the water to create the soup. They are available in konbu, katuso, or other fish flavors. Natural, no msg options can now be found in the market.

Add your choice of dashi and place the pan over a medium heat. When done, set aside about 1 cup of the dashi in a separate pan.

Chop the carrot, daikon into thin rounds which will cook easily. Carrots and daikon may also be cut into flower shapes with special new year cutters for a more festive look. Peel the sato imo, leaving it whole. If the potato is large, cut in half.

Place the carrots and daikon into the separated pan of dashi and cook until tender. When done, remove and cook the sato imo in the same dashi. Take care not to overcook so the vegetables retain their shape and flavor.

Prepare the spinach by blanching it. Place it in boiling water, and remove quickly. Then rinse in cold water to retain the green color. Drain and squeeze to remove the excess water. Cut into 1-1 1/2 inch segments.

Set all the vegetables aside.

White or saikyo miso traditional to Kyoto is not always available in the Bay Area, so regular shiro miso, which is a light brownish color may be used. It is not as sweet as the saikyo miso but still less salty and lighter in flavor than the red miso used in the Kanto area.

If you have used the konbu or packet for dashi, remove it and add the miso into the dashi. Taste the soup to see if the flavor suits you. More miso may be added to make the flavor stronger, or water to thin it out.

Grill the round shaped mochi, 1-2 per person. When the mochi puffs up and has a nice color with the inside soft but still retaining its shape, it is ready.

Arrange the mochi, carrots, daikon in a Japanese soup bowl. Carefully ladle the miso soup over it and then top with the spinach and a large pinch of hana katsuo, the bonito flakes. The flakes will dance on top of the soup, something children enjoy watching.