

FOOD & DINING

Cook up Japanese cuisine in your own kitchen



Many people may feel Japanese cuisine can only be enjoyed in Japan or out on the town. But those with access to the bevy of ingredients in Japanese dishes like "Seared Autumn Bonito Sashimi With Apple Mustard Dressing" from Takashi Sugimoto and Marcia Iwatate's "Shunju: New Japanese Cuisine" (Periplus) can enjoy Japanese cuisine in the comforts of home.

SEARED AUTUMN BONITO SASHIMI WITH APPLE MUSTARD DRESSING

Serves 4

13 ounces katsuo (bonito) fillet with skin, cut in 3-section fillet (see below)

Dressing

- 1/4 cup onion, grated
- 1/3 cup apple, grated
- 1/3 cup su (rice vinegar)
- 1/4 cup sake
- 1/2 cup koikuchi shoyu (soy sauce)
- 2 teaspoons sesame oil
- 4 teaspoons vegetable oil
- 2 teaspoons coarse-grain mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon superfine (castor) sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon shichimi togarashi (7-spice chili powder)
- 1 teaspoon white sesame seeds
- 4 medium cloves, grated
- 1 inch ginger
- 1/3 ounce naga negi (long Welsh onion), finely minced; substitute with white part of scallion (spring onion), if necessary

Garnish

- 1 ounce daikon, cut in thin slivers and refreshed in cold water (see below)
- 1 ounce kyuri (Japanese cucumber), cut in thin slivers and refreshed in cold water; substitute with deseeded Western cucumber, if necessary
- 1 teaspoon murame, omit if unavailable
- 2 1/2 tablespoons banno negi; substitute with fine scallions (spring onions), finely chopped crossways, if necessary
- 5 shiso (perilla) leaves, cut in thin slivers

1. Place the fillet skin-side-down on a cutting board and pierce the side with three metal skewers in a fan shape. Sprinkle the flesh lightly with sea salt. Hold the skewered fillet, skin-side-down, over a high gas flame. When the oil begins to bubble and drip and the skin is nicely charred, turn around and sear the other side lightly. Plunge into iced water for 15 seconds to arrest the cooking process.
2. Pat excess moisture away and slice into brick cut (see below) about 1/2-inch thick. Arrange on a platter, the sliced side facing up, in a circular pattern.
3. Combine all the dressing ingredients and mix thoroughly with a whisk. Pour the dressing on and around the fish slices.
4. To arrange the garnish, pile the daikon and cucumber slivers in the middle of the fish slices and top with murame, chopped banno negi and shiso leaf slivers.

Three-section fillet: Place the fish on the cutting board with the tail on the right, belly side closer to you. Insert the knife into the fish above the pelvic fin, keeping the cutting edge flat, and cut till the head. Turn the fish around so that the tail is on your left; insert the knife into the fish above the dorsal fin, keeping the cutting edge flat; cut to the tail. Lift the upper side of the fish and insert the knife with the blade flat. Cut with a slide motion along the backbone toward the tail (do not cut any of the bones) until you have completely freed the top fillet all the way to the tail and the fish is cut into two sections. Flip the fish over and repeat on the bottom sides.

Now you have three sections. Place the middle section (the section with bones) so that the fins hang over the edge of the cutting board, then cut the dorsal and ventral fins off. Save the bones to make soup.

Needle-thin slivers refreshed in water: Cut into 2-inch lengths. Make a vertical cut halfway until the core. Remove the core.

Unroll the outer layers and flatten on the cutting board. Slice vertically into needle-thin slivers. This takes time and practice, and a well-sharpened knife. Take your time and cut diligently in a straight and an even motion.

Place slivers in a bowl of cold water. Refresh for 10 minutes, except for

perilla, which should be refreshed very briefly so as not to lose its flavor. To brick cut: Place the thicker side of the saku away from you; insert the knife perpendicular to the thinner side and pull the knife toward you by snapping your wrist. Arrange on the dish perpendicularly.

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