

COOKERY

Japanese Cookery

Pantry and equipment, rice, dashi, simmering, grilling, deep-frying, ramen, pickling, and wagashi — closing with a capstone assembling rice, soup, a main, and two sides into one real ichiju-sansai meal.

10 Chapters

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CHAPTER 1: FOUNDATIONS & THE JAPANESE PANTRY

Japanese Cookery

Chapter 1 · Foundations & the Japanese Pantry

Japanese home cooking leans on a fairly short list of condiments and a handful of dried ingredients doing an enormous amount of flavour work. Get those right and even simple technique tastes distinctly, correctly Japanese — get them wrong (or substitute carelessly) and even careful technique tastes vaguely "Asian-ish" rather than actually Japanese. This chapter is a no-cooking foundation: what to stock, what it's for, and what equipment is genuinely worth having before Chapter 2's first real cooking begins.

IF YOU'VE ALREADY TAKEN BASIC COOKERY

General kitchen equipment — a good chef's knife, a solid pan, mixing bowls, an instant-read thermometer — isn't repeated here; see that course's own Chapter 1 for the full toolkit. This chapter only covers what's distinctly Japanese: the pantry and equipment general cookery doesn't already give you.

The Core Pantry

These are the condiments and dry goods that show up again and again across this course. Most keep well unopened for months, so stocking them properly at the start pays off in every chapter that follows.

ITEM	WHAT IT DOES
Soy sauce (shoyu)	The default is dark/regular soy sauce (<i>koikuchi</i>) — salty, savoury, the backbone of most seasoning in this course. Two variants worth knowing exist: <i>usukuchi</i> (lighter in colour but actually saltier, used where a dish shouldn't darken) and <i>tamari</i> (thicker, often wheat-free). One bottle of regular soy sauce covers everything through Chapter 9.
Mirin	A sweet rice wine used for cooking, not drinking — it adds sweetness and a glossy sheen to glazes and simmered dishes. Look for "hon mirin" (real mirin, genuinely fermented, roughly 14% alcohol) rather than the cheaper "mirin-style seasoning," which swaps real fermentation for added sugar.

ITEM	WHAT IT DOES
Sake (for cooking)	Adds depth and helps tenderise, with the alcohol cooking off during heating. Ordinary drinking sake works perfectly well for this — there's no need for a dedicated "cooking sake" bottle.
Rice vinegar (komezu)	Noticeably milder than Western white or wine vinegars. Central to seasoning sushi rice (Chapter 2) and to the quick pickles in Chapter 8.
Miso	Fermented soybean paste, sold by colour: white/ <i>shiro</i> (mild, briefly fermented, slightly sweet), red/ <i>aka</i> (stronger, longer-fermented, saltier), and <i>awase</i> (a blend of both). White miso is the gentler, more forgiving starting point.
Kombu	Dried kelp, sold as flat, dark sheets. The base ingredient of nearly every dashi in this course — see the Dashi Ingredients section below, and Chapter 3 for the real technique.
Katsuobushi	Dried, shaved bonito (a fish) flakes — paper-thin, smoky, intensely savoury. Combined with kombu, it makes the classic all-purpose dashi (<i>awase dashi</i>) used throughout this course.
Toasted sesame oil	A finishing oil, not a frying oil — it has a low smoke point and turns bitter at high heat, so it goes in at the end of cooking (or drizzled over a finished dish) for aroma, not into the pan first.
Panko	Japanese-style breadcrumbs — larger, lighter, and flakier than Western breadcrumbs. Worth having on hand for breaded dishes generally, even though this course's own frying chapter (Chapter 6) focuses on wet-batter tempura and starch-dredged karaage rather than a panko-breaded dish.
Nori	Dried seaweed sheets — used as a garnish, crumbled over rice or noodles, and as the classic ramen topping (Chapter 7).
Togarashi	Chilli condiment, sold either as plain chilli flakes (<i>ichimi</i>) or as a seven-ingredient blend (<i>shichimi togarashi</i> , typically including chilli, citrus peel, and sesame). A table condiment, added after cooking rather than during it — good on ramen (Chapter 7) and grilled dishes (Chapter 5).

Dashi Ingredients — Umami Before You Even Cook

Dashi is Japan's foundational stock, and it's genuinely central enough to this cuisine that Chapter 3 is dedicated to it entirely. For now, just know what you're shopping for:

- **Kombu** — steeped (never boiled hard) in water, it releases a deep, savoury base flavour on its own. Used alone, it's a fully vegetarian and vegan dashi.
- **Katsuobushi** — simmered briefly and strained out, it adds a smoky, fish-forward depth. Combined with kombu, this is *awase dashi*, the most commonly used dashi in Japanese home cooking.
- **Dried shiitake mushrooms** — soaked (not kombu or katsuobushi, but worth stocking alongside them) for a third, earthier umami option, and the easiest way to build a fully vegetarian dashi with real depth.

All three keep for months in a sealed container in a cool, dark cupboard — there's no rush to use them quickly once bought.

Rice, Noodles & Other Staples

A short preview of two staples that each get their own dedicated chapter later, so you know what to look for when shopping now:

- **Short-grain Japanese rice** — a different variety from the long-grain rice used in most Western cooking, with a stickier texture once cooked. Chapter 2 covers washing and cooking it properly; for now, just make sure the bag actually says "short-grain" or "sushi rice" rather than a long-grain variety.
- **Noodles** — three worth knowing by name: *soba* (thin, made partly or fully from buckwheat, often served cold), *udon* (thick, chewy, wheat-based), and fresh or dried ramen noodles (wheat-based, alkaline, giving them their distinctive springy bite and yellow tint). Chapter 7 covers ramen noodles specifically.

Essential Equipment

As with the pantry, this list assumes you already have general kitchenware (a knife, a board, a frying pan). Here's what's specifically worth adding for Japanese cooking, split honestly by how

soon this course actually needs it.

GENUINELY ESSENTIAL

- A heavy-bottomed pot with a lid
- A fine-mesh strainer or cheesecloth
- A fine grater (*oroshigane*) for ginger, garlic & daikon
- A rice cooker, or the same heavy pot with a tight-fitting lid
- Long cooking chopsticks (*saibashi*) or a good pair of tongs

NICE TO HAVE, NOT URGENT

- An *otoshibuta* (drop lid) — a round wooden lid sat directly on simmering liquid, used from Chapter 4 onward; a circle of parchment paper with a hole cut in the middle stands in perfectly well
- A stovetop grill pan
- A steamer basket
- A *suribachi* & *surikogi* (a ridged mortar & pestle) for grinding sesame seeds

SKIP FOR NOW

- A clay *donabe* pot — a heavy regular pot does the same job in this course
- Sushi-rolling tools (bamboo mat, moulds) — not used anywhere in this course's own chapter list
- Specialty ramen bowls

DON'T SUBSTITUTE THE FERMENTED STAPLES OUT

Soy sauce, mirin, sake, and miso are each doing a genuinely different job — sweetness, saltiness, depth, tenderising — and none of them substitutes cleanly for another. A recipe calling for all four and getting only soy sauce will taste one-note and too salty, not "close enough." It's worth having all four in before starting Chapter 4, where they first appear together.

A Quick Word on Balance: The Role of Umami

Japanese cooking leans less on the salt/fat/acid/heat balancing act familiar from many other cuisines and more on layering **umami** — the savoury "fifth taste" carried by kombu's natural glutamates and katsuobushi's inosinate, and reinforced again by soy sauce and miso. That's why dashi (Chapter 3) sits right at the centre of this course rather than being one ingredient among many: once a good dashi is in the pot, most of the rest of a dish's seasoning is really just supporting it.

TASTE AS YOU BUILD THE PANTRY, NOT JUST AS YOU COOK

You don't need to wait until Chapter 3 to start getting a feel for these flavours — tasting your soy sauce and miso on their own now (this chapter's own Kitchen Practice, below) builds a reference point that makes the balance in every later chapter easier to judge by feel.

Kitchen Practice

No cooking yet — this chapter's practice is about stocking and tasting, not a dish.

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Audit your own pantry. Go through the Core Pantry table above and check off what you already own. For anything missing, note it against which chapter actually needs it first (Chapter 2 needs rice; Chapter 3 needs kombu and katsuobushi) rather than treating the whole list as equally urgent today.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Taste your soy sauce and miso on their own. A small spoonful of soy sauce, and a tiny dab of miso, tasted plain (not in a dish). Note what each one actually contributes — saltiness, depth, a lingering savoury note — so you have a reference point before either one gets combined with other ingredients later in the course.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Plan your sourcing. Work out where you can actually buy real kombu, katsuobushi, and short-grain rice — a local Asian/Japanese grocery, or a reputable online retailer — and build a shopping list from the Core Pantry table, prioritised by what Chapters 2 and 3 need first.

[→ Solution](#)

QUICK REFERENCE — THE CORE PANTRY

- Seasoning: soy sauce, mirin, sake, rice vinegar, miso
- Dashi: kombu, katsuobushi, dried shiitake mushrooms
- Finishing & garnish: toasted sesame oil, nori, togarashi
- Equipment: heavy pot with lid, fine-mesh strainer, fine grater, rice cooker (or lidded pot), cooking chopsticks or tongs

Next — Chapter 2: Rice: The Foundation of Japanese Cuisine

Washing rice properly, the right water ratio, and how to season cooked rice into sushi rice with rice vinegar, sugar, and salt.

CHAPTER 2: RICE: THE FOUNDATION OF JAPANESE CUISINE

Japanese Cookery

Chapter 2 · Rice: The Foundation of Japanese Cuisine

Rice isn't a side dish in Japanese cooking — it's the anchor almost everything else is built around. Getting a plain pot of rice genuinely right (not gummy, not dry, evenly cooked grain to grain) is the single most useful technique in this entire course, and it's also the first real cooking you'll do in it.

Washing Rice: Why and How

Short-grain rice comes coated in surface starch left over from milling. Left on, that starch cooks into a gluey film that makes rice clump and taste heavy rather than cleanly sticky — the difference between rice that holds together in a bite and rice that turns to paste.

1. Add rice to a bowl and cover with cold water.
2. Swirl gently with your hand for a few seconds — the water will turn cloudy almost immediately.
3. Drain (a fine-mesh strainer makes this easy), then repeat.
4. Stop once the water runs *mostly* clear — after 2–4 rinses for most rice. It doesn't need to run completely clear, and over-washing can actually damage the grains, knocking off more than just surface starch.

HANDLE THE GRAINS GENTLY

Short-grain rice is softer and more prone to cracking than the long-grain varieties you may be used to washing. A gentle swirl is enough — there's no need to scrub or rub the grains against each other hard.

Soaking: The Step Most People Skip

After washing, let the rice sit in fresh water for **20–30 minutes** before cooking (longer is fine, up to a couple of hours). Soaking lets every grain absorb water evenly all the way through

before any heat is applied, which means the whole pot cooks more evenly — no chalky centres, no blown-out edges. Drain the rice before measuring your actual cooking water.

The Water Ratio

A reliable starting point for washed, soaked short-grain rice on the stovetop is roughly **1 part rice to 1.1–1.2 parts water** by volume — noticeably less water than the ratios you may know for long-grain rice. Treat this as a starting point rather than a fixed rule: rice age, brand, and exactly how well-drained it is after soaking all nudge the right ratio slightly. A rice cooker (Chapter 1's own equipment note) automates this entire section — measuring, boiling, simmering, and resting — which is exactly why it's worth having, even though it isn't strictly required.

Cooking on the Stovetop

1. Add the washed, soaked, drained rice and measured water to a heavy-bottomed pot with a tight-fitting lid.
2. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, uncovered or lid ajar.
3. Once boiling, cover tightly and reduce heat to the lowest possible simmer.
4. Cook for **12–15 minutes** without lifting the lid.
5. Remove from heat and let it rest, still covered, for **10 minutes** before opening.

NEVER LIFT THE LID WHILE IT'S SIMMERING

Every time the lid comes off, steam escapes that the rice needed to finish cooking evenly — and it doesn't come back. Trust the timing rather than checking. The same discipline applies to the resting step: that final 10 minutes off the heat lets trapped moisture redistribute through the pot, finishing the grains on the bottom and drying out the grains on top so the whole pot ends up consistent.

Fluffing

Once rested, fluff the rice with a rice paddle (*shamoji*) — or any flat, wide spoon — using a cutting, folding motion rather than stirring. Stirring mashes grains together; cutting through and folding separates them cleanly while releasing the last of the built-up steam evenly across the pot.

Making Sushi Rice (Sushi-zu)

Sushi rice is plain cooked rice seasoned while still hot with a vinegar mixture called *sushi-zu*. A workable starting ratio for about 2 cups (uncooked measure) of rice:

INGREDIENT	AMOUNT
Rice vinegar	3 tablespoons
Sugar	2 tablespoons
Salt	1 teaspoon

Treat this as a starting point to adjust to your own taste, not a fixed formula.

1. Warm the vinegar, sugar, and salt together gently — just enough to dissolve the sugar and salt, not to boil.
2. Spread the hot, freshly cooked rice in a wide, shallow container (traditionally a wooden *hangiri*, but any wide shallow bowl works).
3. Pour the vinegar mixture over the rice a little at a time, folding it in with the same cutting motion used for fluffing — never stirring.
4. Fan the rice as you fold (a folded piece of card works fine) to cool it quickly. This is what gives sushi rice its characteristic glossy sheen, and cooling it fast keeps the grains from turning mushy from residual steam.

USE SUSHI RICE WHILE IT'S STILL WARM TO BODY TEMPERATURE

Sushi rice is traditionally used once it's cooled to close to body temperature, not hot and not refrigerator-cold — cold rice turns hard and loses the texture the seasoning was meant to create.

Kitchen Practice

The first real cooking in this course — everything here is worth doing as an actual pot of rice, not just read about.

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Cook a full pot of plain rice using the complete method. Wash, soak for 20–30 minutes, use the roughly 1:1.1–1.2 ratio, simmer without lifting the lid, then rest 10 minutes before fluffing. Taste it plain and note the texture — this is your reference point for every later chapter.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Compare two water ratios side by side. Cook two small batches — one at roughly 1:1 and one at roughly 1:1.2 — under otherwise identical conditions, and taste them against each other. Notice which is firmer and which is softer, and build a feel for how the ratio actually changes the result.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Make a batch of sushi rice. Cook a fresh pot, prepare the sushi-zu mixture, and fold it in properly — fanning as you go. Taste it against the plain rice from Kitchen Practice 1 and note what the seasoning actually adds beyond just "sour."

[→ Solution](#)

QUICK REFERENCE — COOKING RICE

- Wash until water runs mostly clear (2–4 rinses); don't over-wash
- Soak 20–30 minutes before cooking
- Water ratio: roughly 1 part rice to 1.1–1.2 parts water

- Simmer covered, lowest heat, 12–15 minutes — never lift the lid
- Rest covered, off heat, 10 minutes, then fluff with a cutting motion
- Sushi rice: fold in warmed vinegar/sugar/salt while fanning to cool

Next — Chapter 3: Dashi & Umami: Building Japanese Stocks

Kombu dashi, awase dashi (kombu + katsuobushi), and the umami foundation nearly every later chapter in this course builds on.

CHAPTER 3: DASHI & UMAMI: BUILDING JAPANESE STOCKS

Japanese Cookery

Chapter 3 · Dashi & Umami: Building Japanese Stocks

Dashi is the single technique this whole course leans on hardest. Miso soup, simmered dishes, sauces, even some deep-frying batters — most of it either starts with dashi directly or with something seasoned against it. Get comfortable with the three versions in this chapter and nearly every later chapter gets noticeably easier.

Handling Kombu & Katsuobushi

A couple of real, easy-to-get-wrong details before the actual methods:

THE WHITE POWDER ON KOMBU IS FLAVOUR, NOT DUST

Good kombu often has a faint white, powdery bloom on its surface — that's naturally occurring glutamate, the exact compound responsible for kombu's own umami. Don't rinse it off. Wipe the surface gently with a dry or barely damp cloth to remove any actual grit, and leave the bloom alone.

NEVER LET KOMBU BOIL HARD

A vigorous boil pulls bitterness and a slimy texture out of kombu that a gentle heat never does. Every method below removes the kombu at or just before the water reaches a boil — this is the one rule worth never breaking.

Kombu Dashi (Vegetarian & Vegan)

The simplest dashi, and a fully plant-based one on its own. Two ways to make it:

Cold-Steep Method (easiest, most forgiving)

1. Submerge roughly a 10cm piece of kombu in about 1 litre (4 cups) of cold water.

2. Refrigerate for several hours, or overnight.
3. Remove the kombu (save it — see the Niban Dashi note below) and use the liquid as is.

Quick-Heat Method

1. Submerge the same amount of kombu in the same amount of cold water in a pot.
2. Heat gently over medium-low heat.
3. Just before the water reaches a boil, remove the kombu.

Awase Dashi (Kombu + Katsuobushi)

The most commonly used all-purpose dashi in Japanese home cooking, and the one most later chapters in this course assume by default.

1. Make kombu dashi using the quick-heat method above, removing the kombu just before the water boils.
2. Bring the kombu-infused water to a gentle simmer.
3. Add a loose handful (roughly 15–20g) of katsuobushi.
4. Let it steep for about 30 seconds to 1–2 minutes — do not simmer it for long.
5. Strain through a fine-mesh strainer or cheesecloth (Chapter 1's own essential equipment).

DON'T OVERSTEEP THE KATSUOBUSHI

Leaving katsuobushi in too long, or actively simmering it, pulls out bitter and overly fishy notes rather than the clean savoury depth you actually want. A brief steep and a prompt strain is the whole technique.

Ichiban Dashi vs. Niban Dashi

Everything above is **ichiban dashi** — the "first" dashi, delicate and clear. The same kombu and katsuobushi you just strained out aren't finished yet.

ICHIBAN DASHI (FIRST EXTRACTION)

NIBAN DASHI (SECOND EXTRACTION)

- Delicate, clear, lighter in flavour
- Best for clear soups and dishes where the dashi itself is front and centre
- What the method above produces

- Made by simmering the *same, already-used* kombu and katsuobushi again in fresh water, for longer (10–15 minutes)
- Stronger, more robust, less delicate
- Better suited to miso soup and simmered dishes (Chapter 4), where other strong flavours are already in the pot

Making niban dashi from spent ichiban-dashi ingredients rather than discarding them is standard practice, not a thrifty shortcut — it genuinely produces a real, useful stock suited to a different job.

Shiitake Dashi (A Second Vegetarian Option)

Dried shiitake mushrooms make their own real, distinct dashi — earthier and more mushroom-forward than kombu alone, and a good way to add depth to a kombu dashi without using katsuobushi at all.

1. Submerge a small handful of dried shiitake in cold water.
2. Refrigerate and let soak for several hours, or overnight.
3. Remove the mushrooms (they're genuinely usable in cooking afterward — don't discard them) and use the soaking liquid as dashi, on its own or combined with kombu dashi.

COLD SOAKING, NOT HOT WATER, IS DELIBERATE

Hot water rushes the extraction and can pull bitterness out of dried shiitake. A slow, cold soak draws out the flavour gently, the same underlying logic as the cold-steep kombu method above.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Make a batch of kombu dashi and taste it plain. Use either method above. Taste it warm, on its own, with nothing added. Note what "umami" actually tastes like in isolation, before it's combined with anything else.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Make awase dashi and compare it directly against the kombu dashi from Kitchen Practice 1. Taste them side by side. Identify specifically what the katsuobushi adds that the kombu alone didn't have.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Make niban dashi from the spent kombu and katsuobushi in Kitchen Practice 2, and compare it against the original ichiban dashi. Note the difference in strength and character, and think about which one you'd actually reach for in a miso soup versus a delicate clear soup.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — DASHI

- Kombu: never boil hard; remove just before boiling (or cold-steep overnight)
- Katsuobushi: add off the boil, steep briefly (30 sec–2 min), strain promptly
- Awase dashi = kombu + katsuobushi, the default all-purpose dashi
- Ichiban dashi (first extraction) = delicate, for clear soups
- Niban dashi (second extraction, same spent ingredients, simmered longer) = stronger, for miso soup and simmered dishes
- Shiitake dashi = a second, earthier vegetarian option, cold-soaked overnight

Next — Chapter 4: Simmering & Braising: Nimono Techniques

Using dashi as the base for real simmered dishes, balancing soy sauce, mirin, and sake against it.

CHAPTER 4: SIMMERING & BRAISING: NIMONO TECHNIQUES

Japanese Cookery

Chapter 4 · Simmering & Braising: Nimono Techniques

Nimono — simmered dishes — is where dashi actually goes to work. Chapter 3 built the stock; this chapter builds the seasoned liquid around it and the technique for cooking real ingredients in it gently and evenly, without them falling apart.

What Makes a Dish "Nimono"

Nimono covers a huge, everyday category of Japanese home cooking — vegetables, tofu, fish, or meat, gently simmered in a seasoned dashi-based liquid until tender and infused with flavour, rather than boiled hard or reduced to a thick sauce. The technique matters as much as any single recipe: get the balance and the gentle heat right, and the same method carries across dozens of different dishes.

The Simmering Liquid: Balancing Four Ingredients

A workable starting ratio for a basic nimono simmering liquid:

INGREDIENT	ROUGH PROPORTION	ROLE
Dashi	6 parts	The base — the majority of the liquid
Soy sauce	1 part	Salt and savoury depth
Mirin	1 part	Sweetness and a glossy finish
Sake	1 part	Depth, and helps tenderise

Treat this as a starting template, not a fixed formula — it adjusts with the dish. A naturally sweet vegetable like kabocha squash often takes a touch of added sugar on top; a more delicate fish dish might use less soy sauce and lean harder on dashi.

ADD MIRIN AND SAKE BEFORE THE MAIN INGREDIENT GOES IN

Bringing the dashi, mirin, and sake to a simmer together first — before adding whatever you're actually cooking — lets some of the raw, sharp edge cook off both. Soy sauce is the one ingredient that's better held back; see below.

Order Matters: Why Soy Sauce Goes In Late

Adding soy sauce (or any salt) too early, before a firm vegetable has had a chance to soften, can actually make it tougher rather than more flavourful — salt draws moisture out and firms up the vegetable's own structure before it's had time to cook through. The practical fix: simmer root vegetables in the dashi, mirin, and sake first until they're partway to tender, *then* add the soy sauce and continue simmering to finish.

The Otoshibuta (Drop Lid)

Chapter 1 flagged this as nice-to-have equipment — here's what it's actually for. An *otoshibuta* is a lid, usually wood, sized to sit **directly on the surface** of the simmering liquid rather than on the rim of the pot. It does three real things at once:

- Keeps delicate ingredients (tofu, fish, softened vegetables) fully submerged and cooking evenly without needing to fully cover them in liquid.
- Circulates the simmering liquid gently over the top of the ingredients as it cooks, rather than leaving the top exposed to dry air.
- Slows evaporation just enough that a smaller amount of liquid can still coat everything by the time it's done, without the whole pot needing to be full.

A circle of parchment paper with a small hole cut in the centre (Chapter 1's own improvised substitute) does the same job perfectly well.

A Worked Example: Simmered Kabocha Squash

1. Cut kabocha squash into 5–6cm chunks, skin left on. Peel a strip or two of skin off each piece — a genuine technique, not decoration, that helps heat and seasoning penetrate the

tough skin more evenly.

2. Combine dashi, mirin, and sake (per the ratio above) with a spoonful of sugar in a pot, and bring to a gentle simmer.
3. Add the kabocha, mostly skin-side down.
4. Cover with an otoshibuta (or the parchment substitute) and simmer gently until a skewer or chopstick slides through a piece with no resistance — check after about 12–15 minutes, continuing a little longer if needed.
5. Add the soy sauce once the kabocha is most of the way to tender, and continue simmering a few more minutes until the liquid has reduced and lightly coats the pieces.
6. Turn off the heat and let it sit, covered, for a few minutes before serving.

NIMONO OFTEN TASTES BETTER AFTER RESTING

Many simmered dishes continue absorbing flavour as they cool, even off the heat — genuinely better reheated the next day than eaten the moment they're done. Worth remembering if you're cooking ahead.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Make the simmered kabocha squash from this chapter's own worked example. Follow every step, including adding soy sauce late rather than at the start. Taste it and check whether the squash holds its shape while still being genuinely tender all the way through.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Repeat the same dish, but add the soy sauce right at the start instead of late, as a deliberate comparison. Taste both batches side by side and check specifically for texture differences, not just flavour.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Cook one batch with an otoshibuta (or the parchment substitute) and one batch with no lid at all. Compare how evenly each batch cooked, and how much liquid was left in each pot at the end.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — NIMONO

- Base ratio: roughly 6 parts dashi, 1 part each soy sauce, mirin, sake — adjust per dish
- Mirin and sake go in early with the dashi; soy sauce goes in late, after the ingredient has softened
- An otoshibuta (or parchment substitute) keeps ingredients evenly cooked with less liquid needed
- Test doneness with a skewer — no resistance means it's ready
- Many nimono dishes taste better after resting or reheated the next day

Next — Chapter 5: Grilling & Pan-Frying: Yakimono Techniques

Teriyaki-style glazing and yakitori-style grilling, using the same core seasoning ingredients this chapter just balanced for simmering.

CHAPTER 5: GRILLING & PAN-FRYING: YAKIMONO TECHNIQUES

Japanese Cookery

Chapter 5 · Grilling & Pan-Frying: Yakimono Techniques

Yakimono — grilled or pan-fried dishes — reuses the exact same core seasoning ingredients Chapter 4 just balanced for simmering, aimed at direct, higher heat instead. Getting a real glaze right is mostly about timing, not the recipe itself.

Two Styles of Yakimono: Tare and Shio

TARE (GLAZED)

- A reduced soy sauce/mirin/sake/sugar glaze, brushed on in stages while cooking
- Teriyaki is the best-known example
- Builds a glossy, caramelised finish

SHIO (SALTED)

- Just salt, applied before or during grilling — no glaze at all
- Lets the ingredient's own real flavour lead
- The simpler, faster of the two styles

Building a Teriyaki-Style Tare

A workable starting ratio: roughly equal parts soy sauce, mirin, and sake (3 tablespoons each is a good small-batch amount), plus 1–2 tablespoons of sugar.

1. Combine all four in a small saucepan.
2. Simmer gently, uncovered, until it reduces and thickens enough to coat the back of a spoon — this takes real reduction time, not just a quick heat-through.
3. Set aside; it will thicken slightly further as it cools.

Applying the Glaze: Why Timing Matters

The single most common mistake with any sugar-based glaze — teriyaki included — is applying it too early. Sugar caramelises and burns at a noticeably lower temperature than most

proteins need to actually cook through, so a glaze brushed on at the very start has usually scorched black long before the inside is done.

GLAZE LATE, IN THIN LAYERS, NOT ONCE AT THE START

Cook the protein mostly through first with no glaze at all. Only in the final few minutes, brush on a thin layer of tare, let it set for a short moment, then brush on another thin layer. Two or three light coats near the end build real depth and shine without ever burning — one heavy coat applied early almost always does.

Yakitori-Style Grilling

Traditionally cooked on skewers over a *yakiama* (a grill rack), a stovetop grill pan does the same job at home:

1. Cut the protein (chicken thigh is the classic choice, though the same method works for salmon or firm tofu) into bite-sized pieces and thread onto skewers.
2. For the shio style: season with salt before grilling and leave it at that.
3. For the tare style: grill mostly plain first, then apply the glaze in the final stages exactly as described above.
4. Grill over medium-high heat, turning occasionally, until cooked through and the surface has real colour and char.

Pan-Searing: The Same Principles on a Stovetop

For fish or a larger cut that isn't skewered, pan-searing follows the same late-glaze logic in a different pan:

1. Get the pan properly hot before anything goes in.
2. If cooking fish with the skin on, place it skin-side down first and leave it undisturbed — moving it too early tears the skin before it's had a chance to release from the pan and crisp.
3. Cook most of the way through on the first side, flip once, and finish.
4. Glaze in the final minute or two, exactly as with the grilled version — the same burn risk applies equally in a pan.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Build a batch of teriyaki-style tare and reduce it properly. Watch how it changes consistency as it reduces, and stop once it genuinely coats the back of a spoon rather than guessing by time alone.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Grill or pan-sear a protein of your choice two ways — one glazed early, one glazed late in thin layers — as a deliberate comparison. Note exactly how the early-glazed version burns or scorches compared to the late-glazed one.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Cook the same protein two ways — shio (salt only) and tare (glazed) — and taste them side by side. Decide honestly which style better suits the specific ingredient you used, and why.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — YAKIMONO

- Tare (glazed) vs. shio (salt-only) — two genuinely different, both legitimate, styles
- Teriyaki tare: roughly equal parts soy sauce, mirin, sake, plus sugar, reduced until it coats a spoon
- Glaze late, in thin layers — sugar burns well before most proteins finish cooking
- Fish, skin-side down first, left undisturbed until it releases naturally
- Yakitori: skewered, grilled, salted or glazed by the same rules above

Next — Chapter 6: Deep-Frying: Tempura & Karaage

Batter and starch-dredge techniques, oil temperature, and real deep-frying safety.

CHAPTER 6: DEEP-FRYING: TEMPURA & KARAAGE

Japanese Cookery

Chapter 6 · Deep-Frying: Tempura & Karaage

Two genuinely different coatings, two genuinely different reasons they work. Tempura's whole point is a light, barely-there crust; karaage's is a real crunchy, well-seasoned crust holding in a marinated interior. Neither is difficult — both depend on getting one or two specific details right.

Two Very Different Coatings

TEMPURA

- A thin, wet batter — flour and ice-cold water (often with egg)
- Light, lacy, almost translucent when done well
- Unseasoned on its own — usually dipped in a separate sauce

KARAAGE

- Marinated first (soy sauce, sake, ginger, garlic), then dredged in dry starch
- A thicker, deeply savoury, shatteringly crisp crust
- Seasoned all the way through, not just on the surface

Tempura Batter: Cold, Lumpy, and Barely Mixed

A simple starting ratio: roughly equal parts flour and ice-cold water (some recipes cut a little of the flour with cornstarch, which further limits gluten development). The real technique is almost entirely about what *not* to do:

- **Keep everything ice-cold.** Use ice water, and consider keeping a few ice cubes floating in the batter itself while you work.
- **Barely mix it.** Stir just until the flour is roughly incorporated — real lumps of dry flour still visible are completely fine, even desirable.
- **Mix it right before frying, not ahead of time.** Batter left sitting continues developing gluten even at cold temperatures, just more slowly.

OVERMIXING IS THE SINGLE MOST COMMON TEMPURA MISTAKE

Stirring batter smooth develops gluten in the flour — exactly what you don't want here. A smooth, well-mixed batter fries up thick, tough, and bread-like instead of light and crisp. Cold temperature slows gluten development; minimal mixing is what actually prevents it.

Oil Temperature and the Batter-Drop Test

Tempura is typically fried around **170–180°C (roughly 340–355°F)** — a bit lower for delicate vegetables, a bit higher for a very quick fry. Without a thermometer, drop a small bit of batter into the oil: it should sink slightly, then rise back to the surface almost immediately and start sizzling right away. If it sinks and stays down, the oil isn't hot enough yet; if it barely touches the surface before flying back up and browning fast, it's too hot.

DON'T OVERCROWD THE OIL

Adding too much at once drops the oil's own temperature sharply, and everything in the pot ends up soaking in oil rather than frying quickly — the real cause of greasy, soggy tempura. Fry in small batches, giving the oil time to recover its temperature between them.

Karaage: Marinate, Dredge, Double-Fry

1. Marinate bite-sized chicken pieces in soy sauce, sake, grated ginger, and grated garlic for at least 20–30 minutes (longer develops more flavour).
2. Drain off excess marinade, then dredge each piece in potato starch (or a flour/potato-starch mix) until fully coated.
3. **First fry:** fry at a moderate temperature until just cooked through.
4. Rest the pieces briefly on a rack.
5. **Second fry:** return to hotter oil for a short final fry, just long enough to build a real, shatteringly crisp exterior.

THE DOUBLE-FRY IS THE REAL REASON KARAAGE STAYS CRISP

A single fry hot enough to crisp the outside properly often overcooks the inside; a single fry gentle enough to cook the inside through leaves the outside merely cooked, not genuinely crisp. Splitting it into a moderate first fry (cooks it through) and a hot, brief second fry (crisps the surface) solves both problems at once — and the coating stays crisp noticeably longer afterward too.

Deep-Frying Safety

- Use a deep, heavy pot, and never fill it more than about a third to a half full of oil — hot oil rises and can spill over the moment something is added.
- Never leave hot oil unattended, even briefly.
- Pat ingredients dry before frying — excess surface moisture causes sudden, dangerous spattering the instant it hits hot oil.
- Lower food into the oil gently, away from your body, rather than dropping it in.
- Keep a metal lid or baking sheet within reach. If oil ever catches fire, smother it by covering the pot — **never** use water on a grease fire; water on burning oil causes it to explode outward.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Make a batch of vegetable tempura, following the batter rules exactly — ice-cold, barely mixed, made right before frying. Use the batter-drop test to judge your oil temperature rather than guessing.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Make a second small batch of batter, but this time stir it smooth and let it sit for 15 minutes before frying, as a deliberate comparison. Fry a piece from each batch side by side and

compare the texture directly.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Make a batch of karaage using the full double-fry method. Set a few pieces aside after the first fry only, without the second fry, and compare their texture (once both are fully cooled a little) against the fully double-fried pieces.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — DEEP-FRYING

- Tempura batter: ice-cold, barely mixed, made right before frying — lumps are fine
- Oil temperature: roughly 170–180°C; test with a drop of batter if you have no thermometer
- Karaage: marinate, dredge in starch, fry twice — moderate then hot
- Never overcrowd the oil; fry in small batches
- Never use water on a grease fire — smother with a lid instead

Next — Chapter 7: Ramen: Broth, Tare & Noodles

Building a real ramen bowl — broth base, tare, aromatic oil, noodle handling, and toppings.

CHAPTER 7: RAMEN: BROTH, TARE & NOODLES

Japanese Cookery

Chapter 7 · Ramen: Broth, Tare & Noodles

Ramen is genuinely one of the more involved dishes in this course — not because any single step is hard, but because a real bowl is four separate components brought together at the very end, not one pot of soup with noodles dropped in. This chapter builds a practical, home-achievable shoyu (soy sauce) style bowl using everything built so far in this course.

AN HONEST NOTE ON SCOPE

Real tonkotsu ramen shops simmer pork bones for a full day or more to build their signature cloudy, rich broth — genuinely a separate, advanced undertaking outside a single home-cookery chapter. This chapter builds a real, legitimate shoyu-style bowl from Chapter 3's own dashi instead, seasoned with a proper separate tare — an honest, accessible version of the real technique, not a shortcut pretending to be the whole tradition.

The Four Components of a Real Bowl

COMPONENT	WHAT IT DOES
Broth	The bulk of the liquid — built here from awase dashi (Chapter 3)
Tare	A separate, concentrated seasoning base, mixed into the broth per bowl, not into the whole pot
Aromatic oil	A flavoured oil floated on top for the first aroma you get
Noodles & toppings	Cooked and prepared entirely separately, added last

Building the Broth

Make a large batch of awase dashi (Chapter 3), a little stronger than usual — use slightly more katsuobushi than the standard ratio, since ramen broth needs to stand up to the tare and toppings rather than being the delicate, standalone dashi a clear soup calls for. Keep it hot and ready to ladle at serving time.

Shoyu Tare: Seasoning Kept Separate

Combine soy sauce with a little mirin and sake, warmed gently together — essentially a more concentrated version of Chapter 4's own nimono seasoning liquid, built specifically to be strong.

WHY REAL RAMEN SHOPS NEVER SEASON THE WHOLE POT

Keeping tare and broth separate, and combining a measured spoonful with hot broth in each individual bowl at serving time, is exactly how ramen shops actually work — not a home simplification. It means every bowl can be seasoned to the same, consistent intensity regardless of how much broth is left in the pot, and it means one broth base can serve several genuinely different bowls if the tare itself changes.

Aromatic Oil

A simple scallion oil: gently cook chopped scallions (and a clove of garlic, if you like) in a neutral oil or a little toasted sesame oil over low heat until fragrant, without browning them. This floats on the surface of the finished bowl and delivers the first real aroma before the first spoonful.

Cooking the Noodles

Ramen noodles cook in their own large pot of boiling water, entirely separate from the broth — never in the broth itself.

- Fresh noodles typically need only 1–3 minutes; check the package, since this varies by thickness.
- Drain and give them a firm shake to remove excess water.

- **Do not rinse them with cold water** — ramen is served hot, and rinsing both cools the noodles and washes off surface starch the broth is meant to cling to.

Toppings: Chashu and Ajitama

Chashu (Braised Pork)

Roll a piece of pork belly or shoulder into a tight cylinder and tie it with kitchen string — this is what keeps it holding a neat round shape once sliced. Sear it, then braise it low and slow in a soy/mirin/sake/sugar liquid using exactly Chapter 4's own nimono technique (an otoshibuta included) for 1.5–2 hours or more, until genuinely tender. Cool before slicing thin.

Ajitama (Marinated Soft-Boiled Egg)

1. Lower eggs gently into already-boiling water and cook for about 6–7 minutes for a jammy, soft-set yolk.
2. Transfer immediately to ice water to stop the cooking and make peeling easier.
3. Peel gently once cool.
4. Marinate in a mix of soy sauce, mirin, and water (or diluted leftover tare) in the fridge for at least a few hours, ideally overnight.

Assembly Order — Why It Matters

- 1 Ladle a measured spoonful of tare into the bottom of the bowl — before anything else.
- 2 Pour hot broth over the tare and stir to combine fully.
- 3 Add the drained, well-shaken noodles.
- 4 Arrange chashu, halved ajitama, and any other toppings on top.

- 5 Drizzle the aromatic oil over the very top just before serving.

TARE AND BROTH MIX BEFORE THE NOODLES GO IN — NOT AFTER

Adding noodles before the tare is properly stirred into the broth risks the noodles sitting in unevenly seasoned liquid — some bites too salty, some bland. Mixing tare and broth fully first, then adding noodles, is what keeps the seasoning consistent through the whole bowl.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Build a complete bowl — broth, tare, aromatic oil, noodles, and at least one topping — following the assembly order exactly. Taste it, and check whether the seasoning feels consistent from the first bite to the last.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Make a second bowl, but add the noodles to the bowl before mixing in the tare, as a deliberate comparison. Taste the broth near the noodles versus broth from elsewhere in the bowl, and note any unevenness.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Taste a spoonful of finished broth with the aromatic oil floated on top, and a spoonful with the oil stirred in instead. Note the difference in aroma specifically, not just taste, and think about why the oil is meant to stay on the surface.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — RAMEN

- Four separate components: broth, tare, aromatic oil, noodles + toppings
- Tare is mixed per bowl, not into the whole pot — real ramen-shop practice
- Noodles cook separately; never rinse with cold water
- Assembly order: tare → broth (stir) → noodles → toppings → oil on top last
- Chashu reuses Chapter 4's own nimono braising technique

Next — Chapter 8: Pickling & Preserved Sides: Tsukemono

Quick pickles and their role as a palate-cleansing side in a full Japanese meal.

CHAPTER 8: PICKLING & PRESERVED SIDES: TSUKEMONO

Japanese Cookery

Chapter 8 · Pickling & Preserved Sides: Tsukemono

Tsukemono (pickles) are the smallest, quickest thing you'll make in this course — and one of the most genuinely useful, since a proper Japanese meal almost always includes one. This chapter also sets up exactly what that "proper meal" actually looks like, ahead of the capstone.

Two Quick Pickle Methods

Tsukemono is a genuinely broad category — some real methods, like *nukazuke* (fermenting vegetables in a maintained rice-bran bed), take real daily upkeep and sit outside this course's own scope entirely. The two methods below are quick, accessible, and need no special equipment beyond what Chapter 1 already covers.

SHIOZUKE (SALT PICKLING)

- Vegetable + salt only
- Salt draws water out directly
- Ready in as little as 15–30 minutes

SU-ZUKE (VINEGAR PICKLING)

- Vegetable marinated in a seasoned vinegar mixture
- The same real technique family as Chapter 2's sushi-zu
- A brighter, more acidic result

Shiozuke — Salt Pickling

1. Slice the vegetable thinly (cucumber, daikon, and cabbage all work well).
2. Weigh it, and add salt at roughly **2% of the vegetable's own weight** — for 200g of vegetable, that's about 4g, or roughly 3/4 teaspoon.
3. Massage the salt into the vegetable with your hands for a minute or so.
4. Let it sit for 15–30 minutes (longer for a stronger result), weighted if you have the means (see below).
5. Squeeze out the liquid that's drawn out, taste, and adjust — a quick rinse if it's too salty.

Su-zuke — Vinegar Pickling

Combine rice vinegar with a little sugar and salt — essentially the same real technique family as Chapter 2's own sushi-zu, just used to season a vegetable directly instead of rice. Submerge thin slices in the mixture and let sit anywhere from 30 minutes (thin cucumber) to a couple of hours (firmer vegetables like daikon).

Using a Weight

A weight placed on top of salted vegetables — a plate with something heavy on it, or a dedicated pickle press — applies real, steady pressure that draws moisture out faster and more evenly than salt sitting on its own. It's optional for a quick 15–30 minute pickle, but genuinely useful for a firmer vegetable or a longer pickle.

TASTE AS YOU GO — THIS ISN'T AN EXACT SCIENCE

Both methods are forgiving. Taste partway through and decide for yourself whether it needs more time, more salt, or is already exactly right — there's no single correct endpoint the way there is with, say, Chapter 6's oil temperature.

Tsukemono's Real Role: Ichiju-Sansai

A traditional Japanese meal is often structured around a simple, real pattern called *ichiju-sansai* — "one soup, three dishes":

GOHAN

Rice — Chapter 2

SHIRUMONO

Soup — built from dashi, Chapter 3

SHUSAI

Main dish —
simmered, grilled, or
fried

FUKUSAI (×2)

Side dishes — a
pickle is a very
common choice

A tsukemono works specifically as a palate cleanser here — its acidity or saltiness resets your palate between bites of a richer main dish, and its crisp texture is a deliberate contrast to whatever else is on the table. This structure is exactly what this course's own capstone chapter assembles for real.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Make a batch of shiozuke using the roughly 2% salt-by-weight ratio. Taste it at 15 minutes and again at 30 minutes, and note how the flavour and texture change over that short window.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Make a batch of su-zuke using the same vegetable, and compare it directly against the shiozuke batch from Kitchen Practice 1. Note the real difference in flavour character between the two methods, not just "which is saltier."

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Eat a bite of tsukemono alongside a bite of something rich or savoury — Chapter 4's nimono or Chapter 5's yakimono, if you still have any, or any rich dish you have on hand — and pay attention to what it actually does to your palate. Note whether it genuinely resets your palate the way the chapter describes.

[→ Solution](#)

QUICK REFERENCE — TSUKEMONO

- Shiozuke: roughly 2% salt by weight, massage in, sit 15–30+ minutes
- Su-zuke: rice vinegar + sugar + salt, the same family as sushi-zu (Chapter 2)
- A weight speeds and evens out the process — optional for a quick pickle
- Ichiju-sansai: rice + soup + one main dish + two sides (often including a pickle)

Next — Chapter 9: Wagashi & Japanese Sweets: Dango and Beyond

Mochi/dango technique and the mitarashi glaze — the course's second explicitly requested dish.

CHAPTER 9: WAGASHI & JAPANESE SWEETS: DANGO AND BEYOND

Japanese Cookery

Chapter 9 · Wagashi & Japanese Sweets: Dango and Beyond

Dango — the course's second explicitly requested dish — is a genuinely different kind of cooking from everything so far: no dashi, no soy sauce, and a dough you shape entirely by feel. It's also one of the simplest real techniques in this whole course once you know what the dough is supposed to feel like.

Two Rice Flours Behind Dango

FLOUR	WHAT IT'S MADE FROM	WHAT IT GIVES THE DOUGH
Joshinko	Regular, non-glutinous rice	A firmer, less sticky structure
Shiratomako (or mochiko)	Glutinous "sweet" rice	Softness, chew, and real elasticity

Many real recipes blend the two — a dedicated "dango-ko" blend is sold specifically for this — for a balance of chew and structure. If you can only get one, shiratomako alone is a genuinely accessible, commonly used choice for home dango-making, giving a softer, chewier result on its own.

Making the Dough: The "Earlobe" Test

Add water to the rice flour gradually, kneading as you go, until the dough reaches a genuinely specific, memorable texture: **as soft as your own earlobe**. Too dry and the dough cracks and won't hold together; too wet and it's sticky and won't hold its shape. Gently pinch your own earlobe for comparison if you're unsure — it's a real, commonly used reference in Japanese dessert-making, not just a figure of speech.

1. Add water a little at a time, kneading between additions rather than pouring it all in at once.
2. Stop once the dough matches the earlobe test.
3. Divide into small, roughly uniform balls — evenness matters here for even cooking.

Boiling and Cooling

1. Drop the dango balls into a pot of gently boiling water.
2. They'll sink at first, then rise and float once they're mostly cooked — the same real "it floats when it's ready" signal used for dumplings generally.
3. Let them continue boiling for another minute or so after floating, to make sure the centre is fully cooked, not just the surface.
4. Transfer immediately to a bowl of cold water to stop the cooking and firm up the texture.
5. Once cool, thread three or four onto a skewer if you have them — not required, but traditional.

Mitarashi Dango: Grilling and Glazing

Lightly grill or pan-toast the skewered dango over medium heat, turning until they pick up a little real colour and char in places — this adds texture contrast and a toasted aroma the plain boiled dango doesn't have.

The mitarashi sauce: combine soy sauce, sugar, a little mirin, and water, and bring to a simmer. Mix a small amount of potato starch (or cornstarch) with cold water separately to make a slurry, then stir it in and continue simmering until the sauce turns glossy and coats a spoon.

THE SAME "COATS A SPOON" TEST AS CHAPTER 5'S TARE — THICKENED DIFFERENTLY

This sauce is judged exactly the way Chapter 5's teriyaki tare was — does it coat the back of a spoon. The real difference is how it gets there: Chapter 5's tare thickens purely through reduction over time; this sauce is thickened directly with a starch slurry, reaching the same texture much faster and staying thinner and more pourable rather than syrupy.

Brush or spoon the warm sauce generously over the grilled dango just before serving.

Beyond Dango: A Brief Look at Other Wagashi

Wagashi is the broader category of traditional Japanese sweets that dango belongs to — a much larger world than one recipe covers, but worth knowing by name:

- **Anko** — sweetened red (adzuki) bean paste, made by boiling dried adzuki beans until soft, then sweetening and mashing them. A genuinely fundamental wagashi ingredient in its own right, used in countless other sweets.
- **Daifuku** — a ball of soft mochi wrapped around a filling, very often anko.
- **Warabimochi** — a different, jelly-like confection made from bracken starch rather than rice flour, usually coated in roasted soybean flour (kinako).

None of these are built in this course, but recognising them by name — and understanding that dango is one specific technique within a much wider tradition, not "the" Japanese sweet — is worth having before you go looking further on your own.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Make a batch of plain boiled dango, judging the dough entirely by the earlobe test rather than a fixed water measurement. Taste a piece plain, with no sauce, and note the texture.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Make the mitarashi sauce and grill a batch of dango to go with it — the full, complete dish. Taste the grilled-and-glazed dango against the plain boiled dango from Kitchen Practice 1 and note what grilling specifically adds beyond just the sauce.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Make one intentionally too-dry batch and one intentionally too-wet batch of dango dough, well off the earlobe test in each direction, and boil a couple of pieces from each. Note exactly how each one fails, so you'll recognise the wrong texture immediately next time.

[→ Solution](#)

QUICK REFERENCE — DANGO

- Joshinko (firm) and shiratamake/mochiko (soft, chewy) — blend or use shiratamake alone
- Dough texture: as soft as your own earlobe
- Boil until they float, then another minute; cool in cold water immediately
- Mitarashi: grill for colour, then glaze with a starch-thickened soy/sugar/mirin sauce
- Wagashi beyond dango: anko, daifuku, warabimochi

Next — Chapter 10: Capstone — Building a Complete Japanese Meal (Ichiju-Sansai)

Assembling rice, soup, a main dish, and sides into one real, complete meal — pulling together everything this course has built.

CHAPTER 10: CAPSTONE — BUILDING A COMPLETE JAPANESE MEAL (ICHIJU-SANSAI)

Japanese Cookery

Chapter 10 · Capstone: Building a Complete Japanese Meal (Ichi-ju-Sansai)

Everything in this course has been one dish, or one technique, at a time. A real meal means several of them finishing at roughly the same moment — genuinely the harder skill, and the one this chapter is actually about.

The Meal: Ichi-ju-Sansai, For Real

GOHAN

Plain rice — Chapter
2

SHIRUMONO

Miso soup — Chapter
3

SHUSAI

Teriyaki-glazed main
— Chapter 5

FUKUSAI (×2)

Tsukemono (Ch.8) + a
simmered vegetable
(Ch.4)

Timing: Working Backward From One Serving Moment

Pick the time you actually want to sit down and eat, then plan backward from it — start whatever takes longest first, and work toward whatever takes least time last.

- 1 **First:** start the tsukemono (Chapter 8) — it needs to sit while everything else happens, so it should already be underway before anything else starts cooking.
- 2 **Next:** wash and soak the rice (Chapter 2) — the soak alone takes 20–30 minutes, so get it started early even though the actual cooking comes later.
- 3 **Then:** make a batch of dashi (Chapter 3) — enough for both the soup and, if needed, topping up the simmered vegetable side.
- 4 **Start the rice cooking** once the soak is done — its own 12–15 minute simmer plus 10-minute rest can run in the background while you work on everything else.

5 Simmer the vegetable side (Chapter 4's own nimono technique, at a smaller scale) while the rice rests.

6 Cook the glazed main (Chapter 5) last among the hot dishes — it's quick, and glazing only happens in the final minutes anyway, so it should finish right as everything else is ready.

7 Finish the miso soup genuinely last, right before serving — see the warning below on why it can't sit and wait the way the other dishes can.

The Real Technique This Chapter Adds: Never Boil Miso

Once miso is added to hot dashi, the soup must never actually boil again — a hard boil cooks off much of miso's own delicate aroma and flattens its flavour. The real technique:

1. Bring dashi to a gentle simmer (add a little tofu, cut into small cubes, and a pinch of dried wakame if you have it, at this point — both just need a couple of minutes to warm through).
2. Take the pot off the heat, or reduce it right down to the barest possible simmer.
3. Place a spoonful of miso in a fine-mesh strainer or a ladle, submerge it in the hot dashi, and work it through with a spoon or chopsticks until it's fully dissolved — this avoids the lumps you'd get from just dropping the paste straight in and stirring.
4. Repeat with more miso to taste, tasting as you go rather than measuring blindly.
5. Serve promptly — this is why it's finished last, immediately before the meal is served.

THIS IS EXACTLY WHY MISO SOUP CAN'T BE MADE AHEAD AND REHEATED HARD

Everything else in this meal can sit warm, or be gently reheated, without much real loss. Miso soup genuinely can't — reheating it to a boil does the same damage a first boil would. If it needs to wait even a few minutes, keep it warm well below a simmer rather than bringing it back to a boil.

Plating

Traditionally, rice sits to the left, soup to the right, with the main dish and sides arranged behind or around them — close enough to reach easily, since a Japanese meal is eaten by moving between dishes rather than finishing one before starting the next. Serve everything together, all at once, rather than as separate courses.

Where Every Piece of This Meal Came From

PART OF THE MEAL	CHAPTER & TECHNIQUE
Gohan (rice)	Chapter 2 — wash, soak, water ratio, simmer, rest, fluff
Shirumono (soup)	Chapter 3's dashi, seasoned here without ever boiling the miso
Shusai (main)	Chapter 5 — cooked mostly plain, glazed late in thin layers
Fukusai — pickle	Chapter 8's tsukemono, started first since it needs the most standing time
Fukusai — vegetable	Chapter 4's nimono technique, including the otoshibuta and late soy sauce
Pantry & equipment	Chapter 1 — every ingredient and tool this meal actually uses

Chapters 6 (deep-frying) and 9 (dango) stand a little apart from this particular meal — a fried dish and a sweet genuinely don't fit the ichiju-sansai structure the same way the others do, though either would sit comfortably alongside it: karaage as an easy substitute main, or dango afterward as a real dessert.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Cook the full meal — all five components — following the timing plan in this chapter. Aim to have everything ready within a few minutes of each other, and note honestly which part actually finished early or late compared to your plan.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Write your own timing plan for a different combination of dishes from this course — swap the main for karaage (Chapter 6), or the vegetable side for a different nimono. Work out which dish needs to start first and why, using the same backward-planning logic as this chapter.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Make two small bowls of miso soup — one finished properly (miso added off the boil, never reheated hard) and one deliberately brought back to a boil after the miso is added. Taste both and note the real difference the chapter's own warning is describing.

[→ Solution](#)

QUICK REFERENCE — ICHIJU-SANSAI

- Rice + soup + one main + two sides, served together, not as separate courses
- Plan backward from serving time — longest-standing dish (tsukemono) starts first
- Miso soup finishes last and is never boiled once miso is added
- Every component in this meal reuses a technique from an earlier chapter — nothing new is introduced here

Course Complete — Japanese Cookery

Ten chapters, one continuous set of skills: pantry and equipment, rice, dashi, simmering, grilling, deep-frying, ramen, pickling, and wagashi, closing with a real, complete meal built from all of them together.