

Simple Cooking ~ For Not-so-talented Cooks

I. Back of the Box Recipes

The following recipes are staples that will help you get through the year without having to rely on your local convenience store too much. They are quick, easy and usually quite cheap. Also, most of these recipes are intended to feed more than one person and will give you enough to last for a couple of meals or to feed a group of friends.

カレー、クリームシチュー、シチュー、ハ
ヤシライス

[Curry, Cream Stew, Stew, and Hayashi Rice]

So Simple, So Good

Curry is great because it is easy to make, easy to match to personal tastes, and difficult to get wrong. Curry mixes can be

bought at any grocery store and at some convenience stores. They usually come in a block format that looks a lot like a chocolate bar.

If you look at the back of a curry box you'll see a list of ingredients something like this: 400g of meat, 3 medium sized onions, 1 medium sized carrot, 2 large potatoes... The thing about curry, though, is that you can put ANYTHING in it. If you don't like onions, leave them out. If you are heavy on potatoes, pile them in. Feel free to mix and match your favorite vegetables; broccoli, cauliflower, kabocha (Japanese squash/pumpkin, very orange and very good), cabbage, corn, asparagus, mushrooms, tomato, etc. Also, feel free to use any type of protein you want, or just leave it out altogether. Some people add instant coffee, apple, or raisins to create a unique flavour.

The back of the box instructions are quite easy, but also quite written in Japanese. Here is a simple curry recipe. (Start the rice in the rice cooker before you start cutting up the vegetables. That way both will finish about the same time.)

1. Cut up all the meat and vegetables into bite-sized pieces. Fry them in a pot with some oil.
2. Once the meat looks cooked, add the amount of water specified on the box (this is the only thing you'll need the box for). Look for the character for water 水 followed by either an ml amount or cup amount (カップ). Japanese cups are 200ml, not the 250ml metric cup you may be used to, so consider yourself warned.



1400-1600ml (7-8 cups) is normal. Boil on medium heat for 15-20 minutes or until vegetables are soft, stirring occasionally.

3. After the ingredients are cooked, add the curry mix, stirring as you do so to break up the curry block, and then bring to boil again on a low heat. When the curry roux (sauce) has thickened to your liking, dinner is ready.

**** Cream Stew, Stew, and Hayashi Rice all follow the same basic idea as curry so try experimenting with them as well!**

麻婆豆腐 Mabodofu – The World of Tofu Awaits Your Arrival

Mabodofu is cheap and easy to make. Mabodofu is generally rather hot (in the spicy fashion), but comes in different levels of hot-ness. Look for 甘口、中辛、辛口 [mild, medium, spicy] Feel free to add onions, peppers or ground beef as you wish.

1. In a fry pan heat 180ml of water and mabodofu RED mix on medium heat.
2. Add the tofu and continue on medium heat.
3. Turn off the flame. Mix the mabodofu WHITE mix with 2 tablespoons of water. Mix into contents in frying pan.
4. Heat again until it thickens slightly. Pour over rice and serve.



チャーハン “Chahan” Fried Rice – Faster Than a Speeding Bullet

Chahan is super quick and a good way to spice up that rice you'll be living off of if you let your finances get too low. All you need is about 2 cups of rice, an egg and some oil. Scramble the egg in the oil first, then add rice, then add the mix. Ta-da! There are many different flavors and many possible add-in ingredients you can choose from.



II. Rice Cookers

Rice cookers are probably the best invention ever. Even if you only plan on being in Japan one year, I strongly recommend you invest in a rice cooker. Rice cookers aren't just for cooking rice, there are many other dishes that can be made. Some have even been known to make cakes in their rice cookers!

Want to know what all of those buttons on your rice cooker mean? Check out the rice cooker diagram at the end of this handout.

Here are a few rice cooker tips:

Tip # 1: When cooking rice, throw in a raw egg or two with a few minutes left on the timer. Once the timer goes off you'll have a nice fried egg on rice treat. Add seasoning as you wish.

Tip #2: To maximize use of your rice cooker's awesome power, wrap some vegetables in foil and put them on the rice cooker with the rice when there are about 5 minutes left. Cooking time will vary depending on the vegetable, so some may need more time. Also, add butter or seasoning to the vegetables before putting them in the foil.

Tip #3: Always find yourself confused on what to do as you walk through the fish section at the grocery store? Confuse no more! Grab a fish, cut it up, wrap it in foil and throw it in to your rice cooker with 5-10 minutes left.

Tip #4: Add some butter, garlic, and spices to your rice for a quick and delicious Rice Pilaf.

There are also some special rice add-ins you can get to change the flavor of your rice or make it a bit healthier.

Kibi (millet) – little yellow things that make your rice nice and healthy. Look for them in the rice section of your local store.

Mugi (barley/wheat) – mugi rice is delicious! It's a nice cheap addition for those who never add anything into their rice.

Soy beans (daizu) – Another healthy addition. Mix these in with your rice when you first put the rice in the cooker.

Mixes – there are several mixes of different ingredients like kibi and mugi which can be added to your rice. These will also be in the rice section of your local store. Just look for the stuff that looks like birdseed.

Genmai- Genmai is brown rice. Be aware that it cooks differently than white rice as it requires more water and more time.

III. Noodles

The noodle world is also a fantastic one. There are so many to choose from: ramen, udon, somen, soba, and on and on. Each of these also come in 3 different kinds of varieties; fresh, dried, instant, and frozen. Although convenient, we do encourage you to stay away from instant cup noodles due to their high sodium and saturated fat content. Opt for dried noodles instead if you're looking for something with a longer shelf life.

ラーメン **Ramen**

Ok, there is instant ramen that comes in a cup and only requires only hot water. But, you will see packs of fresh (生、半生) ramen with sauce in the refrigerator of any grocery store. These taste **way** better than instant ramen and are quite cheap and very easy to make. Boil water, add the noodles and wait until they soften. Then you just add the seasoning to hot water in a bowl and you're done. Suggested add-ins: eggs, moyashi (bean sprouts), thinly sliced pork, negi (onions), and bamboo shoots.

つけめん and 冷やし中華麺 **Cold Noodles**

Cold ramen noodles (tsukemen) are served alongside a dipping broth which can be either cold or hot. Condiments are usually very similar to that of ramen. Sold in the same section as fresh ramen.

Another good cold ramen dish is 冷やし中華麺 (hiyashi chuka--cold Chinese noodles), found in the same section of the grocery store. Good with cucumber, thinly sliced cooked eggs, tomato, and ham.

うどん **Udon**

Udon is another easy and cheap noodle wonder. Single packs of udon along with frozen multiple packs of udon are sold at most grocery stores. Suggested add-ins: thinly sliced pork, boiled eggs, green onions.

そうめん **Somen**

Somen is great in the summer as it is often eaten cold. Somen noodles are boiled like other noodles, and then they are put in cold water to cool them down. The noodles are then momentarily dipped in a cool soup (see "soup base" below) before they are eaten. Cucumbers make great add-ins.

そば **Soba**

Soba is a year-round treat as it can be eaten hot or cold. Soba can be dipped momentarily into a soup like somen, or be cooked/heated in the soup base, like udon or ramen. Green onions, chili pepper flakes (唐辛子), and boiled eggs make great add-ins.

Soup Base

You can buy Tsuyu つゆ (seen at right) at any grocery store. This stuff is cheap, tasty, and can be used for just about any type of noodle. Tsuyu comes in different varieties, but it is generally concentrated, and will have instructions on the back for how much water should be added depending on the kind of noodle you're eating. Tsuyu makes a great dipping soup for Somen or soup base for Soba.



IV. More Ideas

Tofu Burgers

Tofu burgers are incredible easy to make as well. The whole process only takes 10-15 minutes.

To get started you will need: tofu hamburger mix, 1 block, 300-350g, of Momen (木綿) tofu, a tablespoon or so of cooking oil. Make sure that you get Momen tofu! If you get the softer type of tofu (kinu goshi) the tofu won't stick to itself enough for you to make patties out of it.



1. Drain the tofu to get the water out. The package actually recommends that this be done in a microwave, but I'm too lazy for that. I just squeeze the tofu in my hands until I see a bit of water running out.

2. In a bowl combine the tofu and tofu mix powder. Stir until the powder is mixed in evenly. Make patties out of the tofu. You should have four patties.

3. Heat the oil in a frying pan and place the patties in the pan on medium heat. Once the side down turns a lovely light brown then flip them over and fry the other side.

4. Add toppings of your choice. I recommend avocado or red onion.

Nabe

Nabe is the best thing on earth in the winter. It will warm your heart and soul with its goodness...or at least make your forehead sweat. Nabe refers to an earthen pot that is used to boil tofu, vegetables, meat or whatever else someone decides to put in. Grocery stores sell nabe base soups. You simply add the soup to the nabe, turn on the flame and throw whatever you want in as the soup begins to boil. After the meat & vegs are eaten, noodles or rice are usually added to the remaining broth for a flavourful starchy finish to your meal. My favorite nabe is kimchi nabe. I start off with the base soup and then add the following:

- meat
- tofu (normal and/or fried)
- onion
- mushrooms (any kind)
- hakusai (Chinese cabbage)
- kimuchi
- any other greenery that catches your eye at the store

II. Good Phrases to know

Eigo no menyū ga arimasu ka? – Is there an English menu?

Issho haraimasu – We'll pay together.

Betsu-betsu de haraimasu – We'll pay separately.

Meshi agari de – For inside.

Mochi kaeri de – For take-out.

Okaikei onegaishimasu – Please bring the bill.

Watashi wa bejitarian desu.- I'm a vegetarian.

Kono/sono naka ni niku ga haitte imasu ka? – Is there meat inside this/that?

Kono/sono naka ni doubutsu no seihin ga haitte imasu ka? -Is there meat by-products inside this/that?

Niku nuki de onegaishimasu – Without meat please.

Bejitarian muki no ryouri ga arimasu ka? – Is there any dish suitable for a vegetarian?

Osusume wa? What's your recommendation?

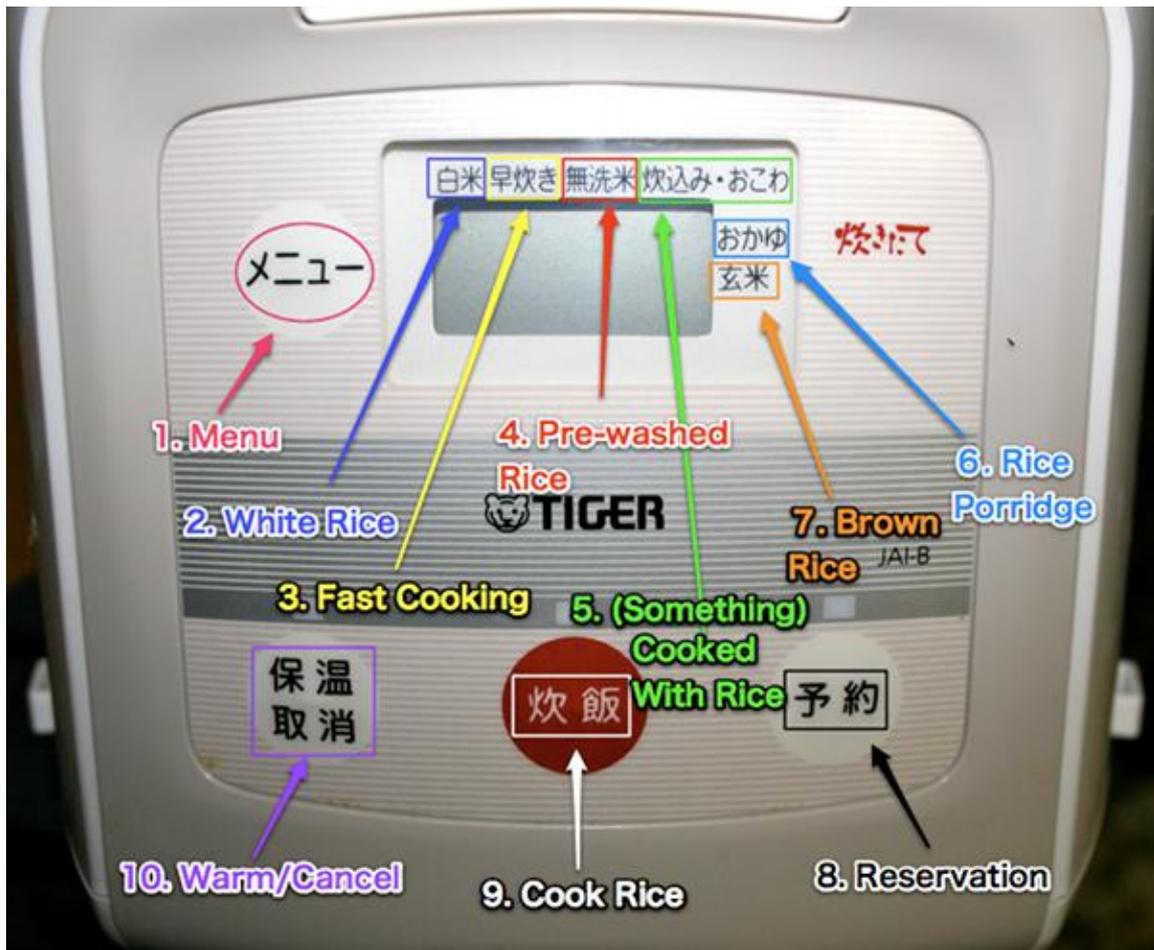
III. Kitchen Kanji

1. Microwave Oven

解凍	defrost	オーブン	oven
あたため	warm up/heat	強火	high heat
温度	temperature	中火	medium heat
自動	automatic	弱火	low heat
グリル	grill	取り消し	clear/cancel

2. Rice Cooker

Your rice cooker may be very basic, or filled with all the bells and whistles you could ever want. Here's a quick guide to some of the kanji on rice cookers.



IV. Links

Great Online Food Stores in Japan

Foreign Buyer's Club (<http://www.fbcusa.com/eng/>)

Tengu Natural Foods (http://store.alishan.jp/index.php?main_page=index&language=en) A personal favourite. Tengu is great for vegans/vegetarians or those who like to buy organic and fair trade foods.

The Flying Pig (<http://www.theflyingpig.com/TFP/Shop.ASP>) Also stocks items for the classroom and home.

Spice Home (<http://www.spicehome.jp/>) A variety of spices, oils, and ingredients sourced from the Middle East

The Meat Guy (<http://www.themeatguy.jp/>) What the name says... buy good quality meat sourced from all around the world.

Mundo Latino (<http://www.nambei.com/ja/>) Latin American foods

Yoyo Market (<http://yoyomarket.jp/>) Purchases food from Costco. You can also buy items from Ikea through this company.

Ezo Beers (<http://www.ezo-beer.com/eng/index.htm>) For when you're sick and tired of Japanese beer

Ambika (<http://www.ambikajapan.com/#>) Indian and Pakistan foods

Lohas (<http://www.rawfood-lohas.com/index.shtml>) Raw and Natural foods

Websites

Just Hungry and Just Bento (www.justhungry.com and www.justbento.com)

Cooking with Dog (Youtube) (Disclaimer: This channel is not about eating dogs. It is one of the most-loved cooking channels on Youtube)

Tabemoto (www.tabemoto.com) Kumamoto-based food and cooking blog

Sumo Kitchen (<http://sumokitchen.com/>)

Cookpad (www.cookpad.com) Japanese language user-submitted recipe site. Don't let that scare you off though! Many recipes have step by step photos.