



Mealtime at Mayuko's Little Kitchen



Okada Mayuko

A Japanese Home Cooking School for Overseas Visitors and Non-Japanese Residents

Okada Mayuko is the owner of Mayuko's Little Kitchen, a small cooking school in Tokyo, and she teaches Japanese home cooking to overseas visitors and residents. We'll look at what makes her school so appealing, as well as two popular recipes.

SATO KUMIKO

MAYUKO'S Little Kitchen¹, a school teaching Japanese home cooking in English, is found in a corner of a residential area next to Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden, an enormous park in central Tokyo. This cooking school was started in 2015 by owner Okada Mayuko out of a desire to have non-Japanese residents experience Japanese life and culture in a more intimate way through home cooking. Mayuko's recipes are

ordinary Japanese home cooking passed down from her mother and grandmother.

There are two basic courses. The first is a one-day lesson for visitors. The second is what Mayuko calls a "survival course," and during this course, mainly non-Japanese residents of Japan learn about how to handle unique Japanese ingredients sold at supermarkets, such as *hijiki* brown seaweed and konnyaku. She also offers online lessons, and occasionally arranges trips to experience the harvesting of vegetables and fruit with producers.

While each small class is made up of only around 6 to 7 students regardless of the program, Mayuko's Little Kitchen has been visited by close to 4,000 people since its opening, gaining the top place among cooking schools for non-Japanese people on Tripadvisor, a popular online travel platform. Mayuko has also received the Certificate of Excellence award six years in a row for offering an excellent service allowing customers to eat authentic Japanese food and understand food culture.

Mayuko says, "In Japan, we select

¹ <https://www.mayukoslittlekitchen.com>

Mushroom & Salted Salmon Rice (serves 3 to 4)

Ingredients

360 ml (or 1.5 US cups) of uncooked Japanese rice
150 g of your favorite variety of mushrooms (photo shows *maitake* mushrooms)
Two fillets of raw salmon with skin (rubbed with salt) (If you cannot buy pre-salted salmon, season the salmon with 1 tsp of salt)

Seasoning:

1 tbsp each of soy sauce, sake, and mirin
2 tbsp of sesame oil
Toasted sesame seeds (or spring onion to garnish)

Recipe

Wash the rice and place in a heavy-bottomed pot.
Add the soy sauce, sake, mirin and water, and stir.
Place the salmon and mushrooms on top and heat on medium heat.
When the pot comes to a boil, turn the heat down to the lowest setting, cover with a lid, and let steam for 11 minutes. Turn off the heat, and let it sit for 10 minutes without removing the lid.
Finally, add the sesame oil. Serve topped with sesame seeds or salt to your liking.



ingredients based on the season even for home cooking, and there is a seasonal attitude towards fish, as well as vegetables. If non-Japanese people learn only this, meals in Japan will become even more enjoyable.” Speaking about the characteristics of Japanese cuisine, she says, “Japanese-style cooking draws out the natural flavor of the ingredients, and it is important not to adjust too much a recipe’s cooking temperatures, amount of seasoning, and so on.”

Mayuko introduced us to two popular recipes from her school. 📖



A cooking class

Teriyaki Chicken/Tofu (serves 2)

Ingredients

300 g chicken thigh (boneless)
or 400 g tofu
3 tbsp corn starch (or potato starch)
2 spring onion stalks (as garnish)
(For teriyaki sauce):
2 tbsp sugar
2 and 1/2 tbsp soy sauce
2 and 1/2 tbsp sake (or white wine)
2 and 1/2 tbsp mirin (or if not available, mix 2 tbsp sake with 1/2 tbsp sugar)



Recipe

Mince the spring onion finely.
Cut the chicken into bite-sized pieces (about 2 in/5 cm) and coat with corn starch.
For the tofu version, cut the tofu into bite-sized pieces, wrap gently in paper towels, and set aside.
Make the teriyaki sauce by mixing the sugar, soy sauce, sake, and mirin.
Add two tablespoons of oil to a frying pan, and heat at medium-high heat. When the oil is hot, add the chicken or tofu. Flip the chicken after about 4 or 5 minutes (or after 2 or 3 minutes for tofu). Add the mixed teriyaki sauce to the pan. Turn the heat down to low and simmer for 4 to 5 minutes (or 1 to 2 for tofu) until cooked all the way through.
Put the chicken or tofu on a plate. You can heat the remaining sauce in the pan to thicken it and drizzle the chicken or tofu with it. Finally, sprinkle with minced spring onion. Serving with white rice is recommended.