The World of Wagashi

A Menu by Sarah Conn
Namagashi are some of the most delicate wagashi made. They are usually made with bean paste combined with some other ingredients and have a tendency to spoil quickly. This feature, combined with their delicate beauty make them the epitome of the Japanese image of poetic life—their lives are beautiful and fleeting. Many namagashi are based off of the seasons and nature. In addition to this, many namagashi are based off of classical poetry and literature. To see more examples, please go to page 7. Namagashi are usually made for tea ceremony and usually taste the same to balance out the bitter tea.

Mochi are delicious sweets made from pounding glutinous rice until it forms a sticky paste that then covers a filling and is steamed. They are usually served with leaves wrapped around them.

Manju are steamed buns with dough made from yam or flour that are filled with bean paste.

The production of manju depends on koji mold—a mold grown on fermenting rice. Koji is then used to make sake-dane which is the leavening agent for manju. A wagashi shop must always use the same type of koji because the manju base flavor tastes different if a different type of yeast is used.

Some of the more famous manju include usagi manju. Usagi manju are manju that are made to look like rabbits for the moon-viewing festival.

Mochi

Manju

An, also known as anko, is a paste made out of boiled adzuki beans. An has been described as “the life’ of the precious sweets...the thing that’s at the heart of it all” (Ando Natsu, Episode 4). Funnily enough, an is usually the filling for most wagashi, making it literally the “heart” of a wagashi.

There are many types of anko. White anko is made out of white beans. Most wagashi shops have their own super secret recipe for making an—the quality of the an determines the quality of the wagashi, so it is very important.

There are different types of an including:

- Koshi-an: smooth, pureed an
- Tsubushi-an: chunky an with parts of the beans not crushed

The traditional Japanese sweet, wagashi, is meant to entice the five senses. From the names—with such a lyrical sound—to the delicate tastes and textures—created out of anko and other delicious ingredients—to the scent that one inhales as the wagashi is lifted to one’s lips, to the gorgeous appearances—some of them too cute to eat!—wagashi are meant to be an experience for the whole body.

There are more types than the ones mentioned on the previous page, and more are shown on the following pages, so what are you waiting for? Start reading!

The world of wagashi awaits come and eat your fill...
Dango are a delicious snack popular in Japan. They are small dumplings with a soft and chewy texture. Here’s a basic recipe to create easy, popular sweets:

### Ingredients:
- 1 1/3 cups hot water
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon matcha powder
- 1 teaspoon matcha green tea powder
- 1/2 cup gluten-free flour
- 1/2 cup gluten-free baking powder
- 1/2 cup potato starch
- 1/2 cup green tea powder

### Instructions:
1. Mix the dry ingredients in a mixing bowl.
2. Pour the matcha green tea powder and salt into the dry mixture and mix well.
3. Add the hot water to the mixture and mix until the dough is smooth.
4. Knead the dough for about 10 minutes until it is soft and sticky.
5. Divide the dough into equal parts and knead each part until it is soft and sticky.
6. Roll each piece of dough into a ball and place it in a steamer basket.
7. Steam the dango for about 10 minutes, or until they are soft and fluffy.
8. Serve the dango with matcha tea and sweetened condensed milk.

Dango are versatile and can be served with a variety of toppings, such as red bean paste, matcha powder, or sweetened condensed milk. Enjoy this traditional Japanese snack!
Recipe from September 2007.

Kimi-shigure

The name of kimi-shigure comes from its ingredients: egg yolks (kimi). To properly make kimi-shigure, the wagashi must crack while steaming.

1 2/3 cups shiro koshi an (white bean paste)
1 cup plus 2 1/2 tablespoons aka koshi an
1/4 cup joushinko (rice flour)
2 egg yolks, beaten and divided into 3/4 and 1/4 portions

Food coloring, optional
Sarashi-an (anko powder), optional

1) Wrap the shiro koshi an in plastic wrap and microwave on high for about 7-10 minutes. When done, take out and put a damp cotton cloth and place the manju on it. Leave for about 20 minutes. The dough is of an even thickness and consistency of an earlobe.

5) Divide the dough into 11 pieces. Lightly pat with the powder if using, patting the powder lightly but firmly into the dough. Each ball of dough should be about 0.7 oz.

6) Coat each ball with sarashi-an, if using, patting the powder lightly but firmly into the dough. The name of kimi-shigure comes from its ingredients: egg yolks (kimi). To properly make kimi-shigure, the wagashi must crack while steaming.

7) Spray water lightly over the manju dough on the cloth and place the steamer. Steam over high heat for about 10 minutes. When done, take out and put on a lightly oiled sheet. The dough can be tinted during part 2, to suggest different seasons.

8) Steamed over high heat for about 10 minutes. When done, take out and put on a lightly oiled sheet. The dough can be tinted during part 2, to suggest different seasons. To make your manju look like a snowball, peel the skin right out of the steamer.

Using red bean paste, add chopped chestnuts using white bean paste, add in egg yolks.

Recipe from About.com: Japanese Food
This namagashi from Suetomi is based on Lady Murasaki’s ancient tale, Genji monogatari. This wagashi represents a scene from when Prince Genji dances. The fan he uses, inspired this October wagashi. Also inspiring this wagashi are the momiji, or fall leaves, which also give it its name, Momijiga.

Another wagashi inspired by Basho’s haiku from Kikyoya-orii Inc.

This is from the TV drama Ando Natsu and the fictional Mangetsudo. The chagashi (wagashi made for tea ceremony) is based on a poem by Kakinomoto no Hitomaro. Surprisingly, the theme of this wagashi is the moon—not the boat portrayed in the ocean of the sky riding on waves of clouds a ship of the moon.

How to Eat Namagashi

Namagashi are not regular wagashi to be muncheted upon! They are to be slowly cut and savored. Using a tea ceremony tool called kumomoto, a namagashi is cut up into small pieces, speared, and then eaten.

Namagashi and the Seasons

“The proper practice of his craft requires skill and a delicate sensitivity to the changes of the seasons, for okashi change according to seasonal rhythms. This feeling for the seasons (kisetsukan) he extolled as wonderful (subarashii), one of the greatest pleasures of his work. The more mundane tasks, making okashi for everyday consumption, can be equally done by younger men, who possess the necessary stamina.”

So says Dorinne K. Kondo in about the chief of the wagashi in an okashi factory, Ohara-san, in her ethnography about the Japanese work force. Ohara-san is the “traditional” Japanese man—terse, serious, and silent—when he works, but when asked about his artisan work while making wagashi, goes on for pages. Ohara-san trained since middle school to become a wagashi artist, so his point of view on the seasons should have careful attention paid to it.

The seasons have always been important to most art forms including poetry, tea ceremony painting, and wagashi making. There are certain moods that are set for certain seasons which makes wagashi creation tough. If many shops have been making namagashi for May, how long does it take before someone starts repeating other’s work? That is why creativity and playfulness are an important part of namagashi making throughout the seasons.
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