

# Traditional Local Cuisines of Japan

Issue No. 6    **Uzumi**    **Hiroshima Prefecture**    By CGJNYJIC

*Traditional Local Cuisines of Japan* is a series introducing the history and food culture of various Japanese locales through their unique *kyodo-ryori* – timeless regional cuisines made with local ingredients and techniques.

The 6<sup>th</sup> issue introduces *uzumi*, a homely yet surprising rice dish from the city of Fukuyama, Hiroshima.

## What is Uzumi?

Uzumi appears as no more than a bowl of plain rice at first glance. Once you dig in, however, a bounty of ingredients such as meat, fish, and vegetables quickly surface from below! Uzumi comes from the word *uzumeru*, meaning “to bury.” As the name suggests, the defining characteristic of this 400-year-old dish is that it buries various tasty morsels beneath the rice, granting excitement to those familiar with the dish, and a pleasant surprise to those who are not.



## Hiroshima Prefecture

Hiroshima Prefecture is located within western Honshu, in the Chūgoku region of Japan and facing the Seto Inland Sea to its south. Visitors are captivated with its plentiful menu of fresh seafood, with wide range to catches including conger eels, oysters and sea bream. Numerous islands float within the Seto Inland Sea, with one particularly famous attraction being Okunoshima, a “Rabbit Island” that is home to over 700 wild rabbits.



Sportier visitors may also find interest in the Shimanami Kaido Cycling Course, which was designated by CNN in 2015 as one of the “7 best bike routes in the world”. The route stretches between Hiroshima and Aichi, and is visited by cyclists from all over the globe.

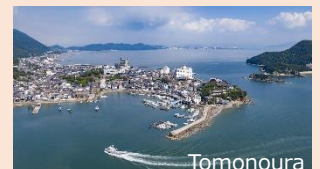
Of course, the prefecture's star destinations are its two UNESCO World Heritage sites: the Itsukushima Shrine, best known for its iconic “floating” torii gate; and the Atomic Bomb Dome, which continues to tower as a universal symbol of the tragedies of war and the wish for world peace.



## Regional Trivia



Besides *uzumi*, Fukuyama has preserved a number of fun traditions such as a 380-year-old net-fishing method for catching sea bream, as well as its “Town of Roses” style of cityscaping that has persisted for over 60 years. The city has also left its mark on pop culture—its scenic port Tomonoura is said to have inspired the backdrops for the Studio Ghibli film “Ponyo.”



©Fukuyama Convention & Visitors Association

## Sumptuary Laws and Uzumi

The origin of *uzumi* is said to date back to the Edo period (1603-1868) in Japan. Luxuries were banned at the time under an Edo Shogunate decree known as the *kenyaku-rei*, which aimed to rebuild government finances while keeping the common people's way of living in line with their respective social classes. Fancy clothing, hair ornaments, and even foods considered to be indulgent were prohibited under this rule.

The commoners simply learned to indulge themselves behind the scenes. Seemingly plain clothing could be reversed to reveal gaudy designs within, and luxury food items like shrimp and chicken were skillfully hidden under rice. It can be said that *uzumi* was a dish born out of rebellion!



## Uzumi

This recipe is by Chef Shogo Tsutsumi of the CGJNY Ambassador's Residence.

### Ingredients

makes 2 servings

Satoimo (Taro root)	1 (about 80g)
Cooked rice	2 servings
Shrimp	40g
Chicken	40g
Matsutake Mushroom	30g
(May be substituted with other mushrooms)	
Soft Tofu	60g
Boiled Ginkgo Nuts	10
Sea bream	80g
Bonito Broth	400ml
Light Soy Sauce	30ml
Mitsuba (Japanese Parsley)	optional
Dried Seaweed	optional

### Instructions

1. Cut satoimo, matsutake, tofu, and sea bream into bite-sizes.
2. Parboil and peel shrimp. Cut into small sizes.
3. Parboil satoimo. Pass sea bream and chicken through boiling water for a few seconds to soften.
4. Combine bonito broth and soy sauce in a pot. Bring to a boil on high heat, then toss in sea bream and chicken.
5. Bring back to a boil, then turn heat to low and skim off any scum. Add satoimo, ginkgo nuts and tofu and cook until the satoimo is tender.
6. Add matsutake and shrimp. Season to taste when all ingredients are cooked through.
7. Transfer the solid ingredients into a bowl and cover with rice on top. Splash some of the broth onto the rice, and serve with mitsuba and the dried seaweed on top (optional).



### Pro Tip :

Try it with a dash of yuzu pepper for a citrusy pop!



### Evolving with the Times

Uzumi has come a long way in history, and like many traditions, its popularity has dwindled over time. Recent efforts to keep this dish in existence include its incorporation into school lunch menus, among other promotional strategies.

Traditional uzumi is a bowl of rice with meats and vegetables tucked away from sight and completed with a splash of broth. In recent times, Fukuyama has been innovating new types of uzumi, with one example being frozen desserts—there is *uzumi koori*, where fruits are buried under shaved ice; and *uzumi soft cream*, with select local specialties buried underneath (perhaps even mini-fish!).

There are countless fun spinoffs in other food categories such as *uzumi ramen*, and even drinks like the “uzumi cocktail” which was served at the 2017 Fukuyama Uzumi Festa. It is exciting to think of all the different dishes that may yet be remade in “uzumi” style!



We hope you enjoyed learning about uzumi in this issue. Please take a crack at recreating (or even reinventing) this surprising dish with an unremarkable façade!