

Japanese Food: Autumn Winter Veges

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Colder months (as it is now in Australia) make us want to eat more stodgy vegetables, so root vegetables are out in full force in Autumn/Winter. The potato varieties in Australia are different from the Japanese ones, and here are a few popular Japanese kinds.

Firstly, there's the yummy Satsumaimo or Sweet Potato. It's yellower than Australian varieties (so lots of Vitamin C which is non-soluble as it's protected by carbohydrate molecules) and we steam and make sweets (like Kinton, a New Year's delicacy) or simply tempura or steam and sprinkle with salt or melt on butter. Always eat the purpley skin, it helps digestion.

The not so common but divine Bonsai Potatoes (Baby Yam) are delightful little tip-of-your-finger-sized potatoes that can be boiled and salted and eaten as a snack or steamed with rice with a dash of sake and salt. Hermits eat them as they are dynamic balls of energy.

Other root vegetables which may not be familiar to you is Burdock Root or Gobo. It has a distinct aroma and is long and woody. We shave it and stir fry with chilli, soy sauce and a little sugar for the popular kinpira dish.

Japanese love their Turnips, and the sweet, succulent kabu or Japanese turnip is often pickled or simmered in dashi and soy sauce and sugar to make them melt in your mouth yummy.

Of course autumn is full of beautiful mushrooms, and the most famous one is the Pine mushroom or Matsutake which people drool over. They can be very very expensive, like \$200 or more for a little piece, and are the truffles of Japan, mostly eaten soups and in rice. Here in Australia, lots of beautiful mushrooms like King Brown, Enoki, Shimeji, Shiitake, etc. are available year 'round, but they are best in season now. Barbeque a selection in foil with a little sake and salt or put in soups, steam with rice. Nothing nicer than Shimeji Rice--stir fry Shimeji with soy sauce and dashi stock and steam with rice.

Daikon comes into its own this time of year, and beautiful organic daikon have begun to surface in selected shops in Sydney. Don't throw out leaves, eat them too. Spinach, Mizuna, Chinese Cabbage are all in shun, or season, so eat them in Nabe dishes (or come to our Nabemono class in June to be shown how..)

A lot of these vegetables are available in good Chinese and Korean (and of course Japanese) grocery stores now, so you just have to look hard. It's great to eat locally grown vegetables in season.

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