

# Japanese Food: Miso

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Miso is considered one of the most nourishing foods, and especially miso soup has fans around the world. But just like shoes, there are so many kinds of miso that choosing the right one can drive a cook crazy. So here is Kei's quickie guide to miso...

Miso, or soy bean paste can be divided into three basic types: 1. kome miso or rice miso made from fermented rice, soy bean and salt; 2. mugi miso or wheat miso made from fermented wheat, soy bean and salt; and 3. mame miso or soy bean miso made from fermented soy beans and salt..

## 1. Kome Miso

a) Shiro Miso (white miso, sweet miso) or often called Saikyo Miso

-salt content around 5%

-ratio of fermented rice to soy bean is 2:1

-takes around 2 weeks to mature

-ideal for miso soups, for marinating fish or meat, and usually eaten in colder climates because of its sweet, full body

b) Aka Miso (red miso, salty miso) or often called Sendai Miso

-salt content is around 13%

-ratio of soy bean to rice is 10:8

-takes around 3 years to mature

-ideal for everyday miso soups, for dips, for dengaku (miso topping on grilled or fried foods)

## 2. Mugi Miso

-salt content around 9%

-ratio of soy bean to fermented wheat is 1.5:10

-takes around 3 months to mature

## 3. Mame Miso or often called Hacho Miso

-salt content around 11%

-yeast /Bacteria is added to steamed soy bean

-takes over 2 years to mature

Miso is often categorised according to its place of origin, but you should be able to figure out which of the three basic types your miso of choice is from the packaging. The amount of miso you use when making miso soup varies according to the salt content and the age of the miso, so always do a taste check.

Like most Japanese foods, miso's origin is believed to be China. Called hisio, it was originally a seasoning derived from soy bean, wheat and salt fermentation, and was believed to have come to Japan around the 7th century. Commercial production of miso in Japan probably began in the 17th century. The basic process of making miso involves introducing a vitamin B-12 synthesising fungus to steamed soy beans and salt (and other grains) and letting it ferment, then grinding it into a thick nutty paste. It is a good source of protein, B-vitamins and minerals though low in fat and calories. Hence, it has been adopted by vegans, vegetarians and the health conscious as a wonder food.

But beware. Miso is very high in salt content (especially the darker miso). Furthermore, as it is a soy bean product, many people may experience allergic reactions to it, and remember that some miso contains wheat.

Miso keeps well in the fridge-just check the use by date. Sometimes, the colour may change, but the as long as it hasn't passed the use-by date, the taste should be the same. Miso can also be kept in the freezer as well, especially the kinds that have a shorter fermentation period.

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