

A TASTE OF ASIA ON THE TABLE

Japanese cuisine is traditionally water-based. However, there are a few exceptions, such as tempura and sukiyaki, which reflect the Western influence that entered Japan in the late 19th century, when the country opened up to the outside world.

Table cooking — sukiyaki, shabu-shabu, and mizutaki — is popular in Japan and is a wonderful cooking method for wintertime. It is heart- and stomach-warming to sit around the table, with the pot set in the center, cooking, talking, and eating the hot food. I even turn down the heat when I make table cooking — it's like enjoying the warmth of a fireplace on a cold evening.

TEMPURA

Tempura dipping sauce:

1/3 cup soy sauce
1/3 cup sugar
1/3 cup dry white wine
1/3 cup water
freshly grated white radish (optional)

Tempura ingredients:

1/2 lb. lemon sole, flounder fillet, or any white fish fillet
4 white mushrooms
4 shiitake mushrooms (optional)
8 slices eggplant
1 green pepper
12 string beans
1/3 small yam (to make 8 thin slices)
1/8 head broccoli
4 pieces seaweed cut into 2" x 3" inches (optional)
oil for deep frying

Batter:

1 egg
1 cup cold water
1 cup sifted flour

To make DIPPING SAUCE, boil all ingredients for sauce, except grated white radish, and cool. Pour into four small bowls. Add grated white radish when you serve.

Cut fish fillet into two-by-three-inch pieces. Wash vegetables and drain well. Slice eggplant. Cut green pepper into eight sections. Peel yam and cut into quarter-inch slices. Break broccoli into bite-size pieces.

Heat oil to 356 degrees for deep frying in a pot.

To make BATTER, mix egg, cold water, and sifted flour in a bowl and manually beat the mixture. The batter should be made just before frying. Dip the tempura ingredients into the batter and immediately cook in the oil until golden brown. Drain on a paper towel and serve hot.

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Note: Freshly made batter and the right temperature of the oil assures light and crispy tempura. Serves four.

SUKIYAKI

As this is table cooking, you will need a skillet — one made of iron and a few inches deep is ideal — on a portable electric or gas stove or an electric frying pan placed in the center of the table. Another option is to cook it in a frying pan in the kitchen and serve the pan on a hot plate on the dining table. Sukiyaki in Japanese means “cook as you like,” and it is fun to sit around the sukiyaki pot on a chilly winter evening, cooking and talking and eating.

2 lbs. boneless rib-eye steaks
2 stalks leek
4 stalks green onion
4 pieces white mushrooms
4 pieces shiitake mushrooms (optional)
1/3 head cauliflower or broccoli
1 zucchini
2 Tbsp. vegetable oil

Sukiyaki sauce:

1/2 cup soy sauce
1/3 cup sugar
1/2 cup water
1/2 cup dry white wine
4 eggs (optional)

Slice beef as thinly as possible and cut into bite-size pieces. (It is easier to slice the meat while it is slightly frozen.) Slice leeks and green onions on a slant into two-inch lengths. Cut off edges of mushroom stems. Cut cauliflower or broccoli into bite-size pieces. Slice zucchini into quarter-inch pieces. Arrange meat and vegetables attractively on a large platter and place on the table.

Place skillet on a portable gas or electric stove or an electric frying pan in center of the table. Heat oil in the pan and place some meat and vegetables in pan.

Pour a corresponding amount of sauce into the pan. Use medium to high heat to prevent water coming out of vegetables.

When food is done, each diner takes pieces of meat and vegetables from the pan using chopsticks and places them in a small bowl set in front of the person.

Traditionally, Japanese dip the food in a slightly beaten raw egg placed in individual bowls.

As everyone is eating, fill the skillet with more meat, vegetables, and liquid. Serve with rice. Serves four.

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SHABU-SHABU

This is table cooking, so you will need a deep pot, such as a fondue pot, on a portable electric or gas stove placed in the center of the dinner table. The name shabu-shabu comes from the swishing sound made when the meat is placed in the boiling water with chopsticks and moved right and left.

2 lbs. lean boneless rib-eye steak meat
8 pieces Chinese cabbage leaves
2 stalks leek or one bunch (about 6 stalks) green onions
4 pieces white mushrooms
4 pieces shiitake mushrooms (optional)
1/3 head cauliflower or broccoli (or any vegetable of your preference)
4-6 cups of water

Sesame dipping sauce:

5 Tbsp. white sesame seeds
1 Tbsp. mustard
6 Tbsp. soy sauce
2 Tbsp. sugar
5 Tbsp. dry white wine
3 Tbsp. tahini sauce (optional)

Lemon dipping sauce:

1/2 cup soy sauce
1/2 cup lemon juice
1/2 cup freshly grated white radish (optional)

Slice beef as thinly as possible and cut into bite-size pieces. (It is easier to slice while the meat is slightly frozen.)

Slice leeks or spring onions slantwise into two-inch lengths. Cut edges of mushroom stems. Cut cauliflower or broccoli into bite-size pieces. Arrange meat and vegetables attractively on a large platter and place on the dinner table.

Boil the water in the pan.

To make *sesame dipping sauce*, parch and crush sesame seeds and mix with all other sesame sauce ingredients in a bowl; divide into four small dishes.

To make *lemon dipping sauce*, mix all ingredients for the lemon sauce in a bowl and divide into four small dishes.

When the water is boiling, each person puts his/her beef and vegetables in the water, cooking it briefly (do not overcook), then picks it up and dips it in one of the sauces. The beef should not be cooked for more than one minute.

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Serve with rice. Serves four.