

SETSUBUN (February 3, 2014)



節分

Setsubun, a marker on the ancient, lunar-based *koyomi* calendar indicates the start of a new season; *setsubun* breaks occur many times during the year. Today in Japan the *setsubun* that is most celebrated is on February 3, and it corresponds to the start of the lunar New Year. In other parts of Asia, China for example, this break is celebrated as New Years. But in Japan since the switch to using the Gregorian calendar in January 1873, *Setsubun* is quite apart from *Oshōgatsu* (New Year activities, which extend through mid-January).

Setsubun rituals developed to insure that evil was left behind in the old year, and good things could (and would) happen in the year to come. *Oni* monsters personify bad things and are traditionally expelled by shouting and throwing dry-roasted soybeans at them. Good fortune is welcomed in by chanting and catching good-luck beans tossed out by Otafuku (Goddess of Good Fortune) Throughout Japan, at temples, shrines, places of business these rituals are followed. In schools, children make monster masks they don while they yell:

ONI WA SOTO (throw the ogres out!)

This is said standing at the entrance to your home and/or place of business while throwing several beans **OUT**, over your shoulder.

FUKU WA UCHI (bring in good fortune!)

This said after you turn around and throw a few beans over your shoulder **IN** to your place of business, or home.

Finally, eat the same number of beans as your age. (I love dry-roasted soybeans and each year I am glad to eat more of them!)

In addition to *daizu* (dried soybeans), there are other special foods associated with Setsubun: *konnyaku* (a tuber transformed into a jelly-like loaf), sardines, and plump, unsliced, mini *maki-zushi*. These rolls are called *éhō maki* because they are to be eaten while facing the auspicious direction (*éhō*) chosen for that year. This year (2014) the direction is **Tō Hoku-Tō (East by Northeast)**

Instructions for assembling *ehō maki* (plump Good Fortune sushi rolls) follow. Sub-recipes for making *sushi meshi* rice and many of the fillings are page-referenced from two of my cookbooks: *WASHOKU: Recipes from the Japanese Home Kitchen* (Ten Speed Press, 2005) and *KANSHA: Celebrating Japan's Vegan & Vegetarian Traditions* (Ten Speed Press, 2010).

ENJOY!

ÉHŌ MAKI-ZUSHI (Good Fortune *Setsubun* Rolled Sushi)
Mini *Futomaki* (Plump Rolls)



Each mini plump roll uses about 1/2 cup *sushi meshi* (rice that has already been seasoned with a sweet vinegar mixture WASHOKU pg 145; KANSHA pg 17) + one, half-sheet of *yaki nori* placed vertically on a *sudare* (slatted bamboo mat) with the shorter sides at top and bottom.

Choose at least 4 or 5 fillings for each roll (some Japanese feel there should be 7, one for each of the *Shichi Fukujin* or Seven Gods of Good Fortune). Consider the COLOR, FLAVOR, and TEXTURE of each filling as you assemble your roll. Two popular combos are:

FISH ROLL...smoked salmon, *kaiwaré* (radish sprouts), omelet (WASHOKU pg 287 + 290), soy-simmered *shiitaké* (mushrooms; WASHOKU pg 188; KANSHA pg 43), pink-pickled ginger (WASHOKU pg 223), cucumbers, *kabayaki* (soy-glazed, broiled eel)

VEGAN ROLL... avocado, cucumbers, asparagus, *Takuan* (yellow pickled *daikon* radish), *uméboshi* (pickled plums), *shiso/ōba* (green herb), *kampyō* (gourd ribbons; pink-and-plummy KANSHA pg 33, to make soy-flavored cook them as described on pg 180, Good Fortune Bags)

LOTS of other suggestions are listed below.

Use pickled vegetables:

- *Yama gobō* (orange, slender sticks pickled burdock)
- *Nozawana* (green, leafy vegetable similar to kale)
- *Shiba-zuké* (purple chunks of eggplant, ginger, cucumber)
- *Beni shōga* (red pickled ginger; julienne strips)

Use simmered or blanched vegetables:

- *Hijiki* (black sea vegetable)
- Carrot strips (orange)
- Green beans (green)
- Snow peas (green)

Use fish/seafood:

- *Kani/kani modoki* (mock crab; red & white)
- Cooked & peeled shrimp (pink & white)
- Fresh *sashimi*-grade tuna (red)
- Fresh *sashimi*-grade squid/cuttlefish (*ika* = white)
- Salmon roe (*ikura* = orange)
- Flying fish roe (*tobiko* = orange)
- *Katsuo-bushi* (fish flakes, drizzled with soy sauce; brown)

To roll Mini *Futomaki* (Plump Roll):

One simple way to shape and pre-measure *sushi meshi* is to dip a 1/2 cup measure (metal or plastic) in cold water (to keep the rice from sticking to it) BEFORE filling it loosely with *sushi meshi* rice. Turn out the rice onto a clear plastic-wrap covered board or tray.

Lay a *sudaré* (slatted bamboo mat) on your work surface so that the slats run horizontally. If there are string tassels at one end of the mat and not the other, these should be on the far side, away from you. Place one half-sheet of *yaki nori* vertically on a *sudaré* (slatted bamboo mat) with the shorter sides at top and bottom. For each roll, spread one measure of *sushi meshi* on each half-sheet of *yaki nori*. Ideally, rice is slightly higher at back. Sloping the rice as you spread it will make it easier to shape neat rolls. Leave narrow borders of plain *yaki nori* on both right and left edges to compensate for the rice being pushed outward as you roll. Wet your fingers in a bowl of water as needed to keep the rice from sticking to them.



Spread a thin, horizontal line of *wasabi* and/or sprinkle toasted sesame seeds in a line across the center of the rice. Lay fillings over the *wasabi* and/or sesame seeds, parallel to each other. Line up fillings wedging items that can scatter (such as radish sprouts or shredded red pickled ginger) in the center anchored by stable items (such as omelet and broiled eel).

Place your thumbs under the near corners of the slatted mat. Hold the edges of the *yaki nori* in place by pinching with your forefingers. (This will leave three fingers “free” on each hand, to hold fillings in place as you lift and roll away from you.) Lift up the edges of the mat and flip the *yaki nori* over the rice and fillings, aiming to make contact just beyond the sloped rice. Several inches of plain *yaki nori* should be clearly visible after flipping. With one hand, hold this *yaki nori* in place while tugging back slightly on the rolled portion of the mat. This will insure that your fillings are snugly enclosed.

Continue to roll, lifting up the top of the mat and pushing the *sushi* away from you at the same time. Let the roll sit, seam side down, for a few moments.



Normally, full-sized plump rolls get sliced into 6-8 bite-sized pieces, but for SETSUBUN they are kept whole (as symbols of Good Fortune you wouldn't want to cut your luck short...). If you will be making plump rolls like these for other occasions: Use a sharp knife. Moisten the blade of your knife between slices by wiping it on a damp cloth. Let the knife do its cutting work as you push AWAY (not down); pull the knife back to re-align for another stroke if need be.