

Nishime

Also known as “waterless cooking” nishime-style cooking involves hearty, sweet vegetables steamed slowly in their own juices. What results is a potful of chunky, delicious, fall-apart vegetables that go down like butter. This dish has a centering effect on the body and mind and is unbelievably simple given the level of satisfaction it produces. If you are feeling scattered and out of sorts, use a nishime to come home to yourself. Make nishime vegetables at least a couple of times a week, using different vegetables, depending on the season.

1-inch piece dried kombu

Half a butternut squash

2 medium parsnips, cut into thick diagonal slices

2 medium carrots, cut into 2-inch “logs”

1 medium onion, cut into thick wedges

4-inch piece of burdock, split lengthwise

1 yellow onion, quartered lengthwise

Spring water

a pinch of sea salt

1/2 teaspoon shoyu

In a heavy pot with a heavy lid (preferably enameled cast iron) place the dried kombu. Add the onion. Layer the onion, squash, parsnips, carrots and burdock, respectively. Pour roughly 1 inch of spring water into the pot. Cover and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and let simmer 10-15 minutes or until carrots are soft. Season with shoyu and simmer 5 more minutes. Remove the kombu and discard or slice into thin strips and return to pot. Serve.

A summer-style nishime might include carrots, summer squash, and green beans.

Pressed Salad

3 to 4 cups Chinese cabbage, shredded

1 small red onion, sliced in thin rings

3 stalks of celery, sliced thinly on the diagonal

2 radishes, sliced thin

1 cup cucumber, peel if waxed and slice thinly

1/4 cup apple, sliced thin

1/2 teaspoon Sea Salt

Place all vegetables, apples and sea salt in a mixing bowl and gently knead with your hands to mix. Place in a Japanese pickle press, available in many health food stores and press for 2 hours or more. If a pickle press is not available, mound the salted vegetables in the center of the mixing bowl, place a plate upside down on top of the vegetables and set a large glass jar (1/2 to 1 gallon) filled with water on top of the plate to apply pressure. Press for 2 hours or more. With your hands squeeze out liquid from the vegetables. Taste, if the vegetables taste salty rinse under cold water and squeeze again to remove the salty taste. Toss to thoroughly mix before serving.

Boiled Salad

A variety of vegetables, including roots, round and leafy greens.

water

1 grain of salt

Slice each vegetable thinly. Bring water to a boil. Add least smelly vegetable (like carrot) and TURN HEAT OFF. Let vegetable sit in water for anywhere between 15 seconds (for delicate veg like bok choy, Nappa cabbage, thinly sliced onions), 30 seconds (corn kernels, carrots, thinly sliced daikon) and a few minutes (tougher greens like collards, kale, and cabbage.)

If you feel that the vegetable has reached its cooking “peak”, remove it with a slotted spoon and rinse quickly with cold water. This stops the cooking process.

Arrange beautifully and serve with pumpkin seed dressing.

Pumpkin Seed Dressing

This dressing is as delicious as it is simple. Great for pressed salads or as a dip, it keeps in the 'fridge for about a week.

1 cup pumpkin seeds, unroasted

1 umeboshi plum (or 1-3 teaspoons umeboshi vinegar)

1 cup water

Rinse the pumpkin seeds and get rid of any broken or weird seeds. Heat a cast iron or stainless steel skillet over medium heat. Add seeds and move them briskly with a wooden spoon over heat until they are dry. Reduce heat to low and continue to agitate the seeds either with a spoon or by sauteing them. The seeds should puff up or pop. When most of them have expanded, remove from heat. Let the seeds cool a little. Then pour them into a blender or food processor. Blend the dry seeds until they are a grainy powder. Add the flesh of the umeboshi plum and about half of the water. Blend, and continue to slowly add the remainder of the water, until smooth . Continue to add umeboshi or water until you reach the consistency of dressing that you desire.