

Dorayaki



What is it?? Dorayaki, or Mikasa, are a traditional Japanese confection (known as wagashi), consisting of two pancake-style cake patties (castella cake specifically) wrapped around a sweet filling—originally azuki bean paste. Nowadays there are a great variety of fillings, such as chocolate, sweet potato or chestnut cream—and even ice cream! The most popular fillings are azuki, custard or kuri chestnut paste.

Castella cake is a Portuguese sponge cake that has become a speciality of Nagasaki, having been brought to Japan by Portuguese merchants in the 16th century. It is similar to Taisan, a traditional Philippine dessert. It contains no butter or oil, is raised solely by egg foam, and has a soft but slightly spongy texture and subtle sweet taste.

They are available in convenience stores, bakeries, grocery stores and shopping centres all over Japan, normally individually wrapped in plastic sleeves. Sometimes the outside is decorated with toppings, or stamps/designs.



History? When it was first invented, in 1914 in the Ueno district of Tokyo, it consisted of only one layer, and was named because of its similar appearance to a gong ('dora' means gong in Japanese). The legend is that the first Dorayaki were made when a samurai named Benkei forgot his gong upon leaving a farmer's home where he was hiding, and the farmer then used the gong to fry pancakes! Some suggest the shape's similarity to the gong, however, is actually coincidental, and that the story was made up to support it.

The actual origins of dorayaki are believed to be ancient. Certainly, in the Edo Period (1603-1867), dorayaki existed, but resembled more of an omelette or pasty, rather than a round sandwich.

In 2008 the major manufacturer of dorayaki, Marukyo, set 4th of April as 'National Dorayaki Day'. It was chosen so it fell between Girls Day and Boys day, as it is a treat loved by many children in Japan.

References in culture? Dorayaki is known as the favourite food of the main character (a blue cat-robot and the namesake of the show) from the manga/ anime Doraemon, which became very popular in the 1980s, and remains popular to this day. The dessert is often used as part of the plot, and Japanese dessert companies sometimes even release Doraemon themed Dorayaki!



How to make:

To make dorayaki, a batter is prepared, and then the batter is poured onto the pan/griddle very carefully. Eggs, sugar and a little honey are whisked together, sometimes with mirin and/or baking soda. Flour is added and the batter rests before the frying process. The cooled pancakes are later assembled into sandwiches (pressed around the edges to give them their shape, and seal the filling).

Whilst the recipe seems simple, it can be difficult to achieve the light, spongy, fluffiness of true Japanese dorayaki.

In many Japanese shops you can buy Japanese pancake mix, specifically for making dorayaki.



もち

MOCHI!

What is it??

A Japanese rice cake made of mochigome. The rice is pounded into a paste and then moulded into the desired shape. Mochigome is the Japanese term for glutinous rice, and is used in several traditional dishes, such as sekihan. It is a type of rice grown mainly in East Asia and has low amylose content, which cause it to become sticky when cooked.

糯米



How is it prepared??

Traditionally, mochi was made from whole rice, in a labour intensive process. First the polished glutinous rice is soaked overnight and steamed, then it is mashed and pounded in a special mortar (called an Usu 臼, with a pestle called a Kine 杵 - the mochi pounding ceremony is traditional and known as mochitsuki 餅つき). It involves two people, one pounding and one wetting the substance, in a steady rhythm. The sticky mass can be eaten immediately or formed into various shapes.

Nowadays, you can begin with a flour of sweet rice, known as mochiko, which is mixed with water and cooked to form a sticky, white mass (although some say the product is not quite the same as proper mochi). The process is performed twice, and the mass is stirred inbetween, until it becomes malleable and slightly transparent. In a factory, it is made from rice, but with assembly line sections in mass mochi production control various aspects of the food, such as the viscoelasticity of the product, by selecting specific species of rice; the consistency of the dough, through the automated pounding; the size; the flavourings and fillings. Household mochi appliances can also be bought to prepare mochi from cooked rice—these automate the laborious dough pounding and control the environment of the dough. Moisture and temperature are very important considerations. One can also cook rice in a rice cooker, and then knead/pound the cooked rice with a stand mixer (though only a certain few are suitable, and you have to change hooks).

Note that outside cities people still make mochi the traditional way.



Some types of mochi:

Mochi is often consumed alone as a meal component, but it is also used to prepare other foods, for example:

Confectionary—many types of traditional sweets use mochi, such as daifuku (soft round mochi with a sweet filling such as red bean paste, anko, or white bean paste, shiro an, or even a whole strawberry, ichigo. Kusa is a green mochi flavoured with yomogi, and when daifuku is made with kusa mochi, it is called yomogi daifuku.

Ice cream—this is when ice cream balls are wrapped inside mochi, and was invented by Japanese-American businesswoman Frances Hashimoto. Production officially began in 1993 but research took over a decade to evolve into the mass production form used today, as the interaction between the two ingredients can be quite problematic.

Soup—one example of a soup dish would be oshiruko—a sweet azuki bean soup with pieces of mochi in, eaten commonly in Winter to warm people.



MOCHI IN MORE DETAIL

History: the pounding process originates from China. The first ceremony occurred during the Yayoi period, 300 BC-300 AD, following the birth of rice cultivation. It had a status as an omen of good fortune, so was eaten exclusively by emperors and nobles.

During the Japanese Heian period, 794 AD—1192 AD, it was used in religious offerings and was treated as a ‘food for the gods’. In this period it was also used as a talisman for happy marriages, and was part of New Year festivities (which it continues to be a part of!).

Over time, mochi has become more common, particularly as methods of production have become cheaper. It is now enjoyed by everyone!

Some of the special varieties: outlined are a few of the seasonal mochi specialities and their relation to certain events and/or traditions.

New Year. There are a few different New Year mochi types. Kagami mochi is a New Year decoration, traditionally broken and eaten in a special ritual called Kagami Biraki. Zoni is a soup containing them, and is eaten on the day (it also contains certain vegetables, and kamaboko). Inako mochi is traditionally made on the day, as an emblem of luck, and is prepared in a specific way.

Springtime. Sakuramochi are a pink coloured mochi surrounding sweet anko and wrapped in an edible salted cherry leaf, and are made in Spring to celebrate its onset.

Childrens Day. This is a day celebrating the happiness and wellbeing of children. Kashiwamochi and chimaki are made—Kashiwamochi are a white mochi with sweet anko filling and a Kashiwa oka leaf wrapped around them.

Girls Day (or Hinamatsuri). Hishi mochi are rhomboid shaped mochi with layers of red, green and white. It is coloured with jasmine flowers, water caltrop, and mugwort. It is presented as a ritual offering on the days leading up to Girls Day!



The Composition of Mochi:

Simple, plain mochi, consists of Japanese rice flour (made from mochigome—there are two types, shiratamoko and mochiko, depending on the desired texture) and water (sometimes also sugar, cornstarch, and flavouring). What gives the glutinous rice its viscosity is the amylopectin content. It is nearly 100% amylopectin, which is a branched polysaccharide, as opposed to amylose, which is also a polysaccharide made from d-glucose units, but is linear. A non glutinous rice grain will contain a much smaller percentage of amylopectin, though it will still contain some glutinous/waxy starch.

Amylopectin is very hygroscopic, so it will swell when water enters it. More amylopectin content in the starch granules of a grain mean it will swell more. The environment however, as previously mentioned, also plays a part in controlling the uptake of water by the starch.

The amylopectin content is controlled by the waxy gene, and grains that have the gene are considered mutants. Crops are selectively bred to create a grain with as little amylose content as possible.

Even more specifically—now looking at the amylopectin itself—the junction zones that interconnect each polymer chain can affect the mochi (this is in addition to the concentration and configuration of swollen starch granules, and the condition). More junction zones mean a stronger, more cohesive gel, so a more solid like material.

Many tests have been and continue to be undertaken to investigate these relationships (e.g. the relationship between mochi hardness/stickiness/elasticity and solute concentration and heating time—hardness and elasticity experience a positive correlation with these chemical properties, but the stickiness only experiences this correlation to a certain point, before the reverse occurs).