



The Vegetable Sushi Cookbook

Izumi Shoji

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The Vegetable Sushi Cookbook is the brainchild of Izumi Shoji, a hugely popular blogger in Japan, who shares her expertise in taking a wide variety of vegetables and transforming them into delicious and healthy sushi meals. Each recipe has been chosen for its nutritious ingredients and delightful taste, and is easy to make with basic cooking skills and no special tools. If an ingredient might be difficult to find in some areas, Shoji provides suggestions for alternatives.

The author covers the entire range of sushi dishes, from nigiri-zushi (the familiar fish-atop-rice style) to maki-zushi (rolled sushi) and chirashi-zushi (scattered sushi). Readers will also find the oshi-zushi style, a favorite in the Osaka area. In addition, Shoji explains in great detail, and with many photographs, the various methods of preparing vegetables for use in sushi dishes, from grilling and frying to steaming, simmering, and pickling. A vivid, full-color photograph accompanies each dish.

The author is a self-taught home cook, not a professional chef, and readers will relate to her friendly voice and practical approach to food preparation. The Vegetable Sushi Cookbook offers a unique and flavorful way to enjoy one of the world's healthiest and most palate-pleasing cuisines.

Q&A

with

IZUMI SHOJI

author of

THE VEGETABLE SUSHI COOKBOOK

Q. What made you decide to be a vegetarian?

A. I've preferred vegetables over fish and meat dishes since I was young.

I especially liked simple Japanese dishes such as grated *daikon* and *shungiku* (chrysanthemum greens) with sesame seeds, but because it's considered not good to have likes and dislikes in food, I trained myself to eat everything (including fish and meat).

However, when I gave birth to my daughter twenty-one years ago, I was having problems breastfeeding her. That was the time when I changed my diet temporarily to include mainly vegetables.

This change made me realize that eating vegetables, grains, seaweeds, mushrooms, etc., was more agreeable to my taste buds and my body, and

I gradually became vegetarian over the course of several years.

Q. What is it about vegetables that you love?

A. Vegetables are deliciously colorful and bright. Vegetable dishes are beautiful. Because each vegetable has its own unique and distinct flavor,

you don't get tired of it, even with vegetable-only dishes.

From a cook's point-of-view, vegetables are tasty even when you eat them raw--you don't need to worry about food poisoning as with uncooked meat or fish. Vegetables are also delicious when they are tender after simmering or stir-frying.

Also, it's less likely that you'll mess up when cooking vegetables!

Q. Why did you first decide to start blogging about vegetables?

A. There were no vegetarian cookbooks available in Japan seven or eight years ago when I started blogging about vegetables. At that time, blogging was just starting to become popular and I thought I might have a chance to publish a book if I could create a successful blog. I really wanted to publish a book on vegetarian cooking!

Q. Why do you think the fact that you're a self-taught home cook rather than a trained chef or teacher at a culinary school appeals to readers?

A. Recipes which require a lot of time, care, and labor are not for everyday meals, even if they look good and taste delicious. You can only spend a certain amount of time preparing breakfast, lunch and dinner for 365 days, and you cannot take a break from home cooking.

When I cook, I make sure that the dishes taste good and that it makes my family happy; but at the same time, it is equally important that the recipes are easy and quick to cook. Perhaps this is why my recipes come in handy for people who are as busy as I am.

Q. Why did you decide on a book about sushi as your first cookbook in English?

A. Especially for people outside of Japan, sushi best represents Japanese food. People may think that only sushi chefs make sushi and that sushi is very special; however, we make sushi, including chirashi-zushi, maki-zushi, temaki-zushi, at home for occasions like celebrations and anniversaries.

There is a festive air about sushi and it makes everyone at home happy. Sushi is perfect for festive and joyful times.

Through THE VEGETABLE SUSHI COOKBOOK, I want to share sushi recipes which are not only beautiful for the eyes and delicious for the mouth, but also can be enjoyed at home and make everyone feel happy.

Q. Why do you think vegetables and sushi make good partners?

A. Once you get the knack of it, making nigiri-zushi, maki-zushi, and chirashi-zushi at home becomes easy. On the other hand, making sushi using raw fish can be difficult.

You don't need special techniques to make sushi with vegetables. You can try various arrangements by grilling, simmering, frying them. Also, using vegetables makes the dishes so colorful. This is why I thought people outside of Japan would also enjoy preparing vegetable sushi.

Q. Many people believe that making sushi is very difficult and they're too intimidated to try doing it at home. What can you tell them to reassure them that yes, they *can* prepare delicious sushi?

A. Making the perfect sushi rice is the key to creating delicious sushi at home!

A rice cooker can be handy for cooking good rice, but you can also use a clay pot or another kind that you already have in your kitchen.

To make sushi rice, you use the same amount of rice (Japanese rice!) and water. Wash the dry rice and let it drain in a colander for about 30 minutes.

If you are using a pot on the stovetop, combine the water and rice in the pot over moderate heat. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat and cook for 10 minutes. Let the rice steam for another 15 minutes.

After the rice is cooked, you add vinegar, sugar and salt to make the sushi rice.

With the perfect sushi rice, you can make and arrange your own vegetable sushi! You just need to form the rice into bite-sized pieces, and add your choice of toppings, like grilled or pickled

vegetables.

I recommend that you try making rice for chirashi-zushi with orange zest and a little bit of vinegar and salt — you'll get a crisp fresh taste that's different from the usual.

Q. What is it about your recipes that makes them accessible, even for beginners?

A. I try to use a small number of ingredients, and focus on ones which are likely to be readily available in anyone's kitchen.

Q. What are the things you enjoy most about cooking and preparing meals?

A. The sound of chopping vegetables completely engrosses me in the cooking, and I'm able to forget all bad things. I truly enjoy being in the kitchen!

Dishes you make while having fun taste good. I try to be positive when I'm cooking—if you are in a bad mood, I think it does transfer over to the food. When I'm tired, I sometimes listen to music while I cook.

Q. If you could have a meal with anyone, past or present, who would that be and why?

A. It would be Paul McCartney.

He is famous for being a vegetarian. When he was in Japan last time, a TV interviewer asked him what he wanted to eat during his visit. He answered, “I would like to eat vegetable sushi.”

Q. What would the menu be?

A. The menu would be all vegetable sushi! Definitely nigiri-zushi with roasted eggplant (p. 34) and deep-fried king oyster mushroom (p. 100), deep-fried Japanese leek maki-zushi (p. 100), roasted shiitake temari-zushi (p. 78), and gingered bamboo shoot nigiri-zushi (p. 37). Making sushi with red cabbage makes colorful sushi, too! I’d also like to serve simmered

dishes and a soup made with *shojin* dashi (vegetarian dashi) using shiitake and konbu (p. 13).

Q. Do you have a “philosophy” about food and cooking that you’d like to share with readers?

A. I don’t have a “philosophy” per se, but I know first-hand that vegetable dishes are beautiful, taste delicious, and are fun to prepare. I’d like to share the joy of eating/cooking vegetarian food with a lot more people!

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