

Kuzu Root

the Multi-talented and Healthful Starch



About Kuzu

Kuzu (*Pueraria lobata*), is a perennial plant belonging to the pea family called Fabaceae. It is also known as Japanese arrowroot since it has thickening properties similar to arrowroot. The kuzu plant is a prolific, tough, fibrous vine with heart-shaped leaves that was used as a food in China for more than 2,000 years, and praised in Japanese poetry and legend as a fortifying health food and ideal thickener. Its roots are among the largest in the world, ranging in length from about 1m to over 2 m and weighing between 90kg to 180kg.

The Kuzu plant has been part of everyday life in Japan since ancient times. Every part of the kuzu plant—from root to leaves—is useful with practically nothing wasted: the root for edible use or Chinese herbal medicine, leaves for cattle food, and vine for fibers of fabrics. The most familiar by product of Kuzu plants is the starch, regarded as the highest quality cooking starch, or jelling agent in the culinary and confectionary world. Kuzu is used in the Kaiseki and Shojin cuisine, the most famous dish being sesame tofu.



Kuzu harvester -- horiko -- excavating a massive root.

Our Esteemed Supplier

Since 1875 Muso's supplier has been harvesting and processing kuzu root from wild plants growing in Fukuoka Prefecture in Kyushu Island. Harvesting wild Kuzu consists of the simple but back breaking work of digging the roots with a shovel. The official harvesting season for Kuzu starts from December and continues through April. There are about 300 professional wild Kuzu harvesters or diggers called "Horiko" working for our supplier. The present harvesting areas span the mountain area of Kagoshima prefecture to the Miyazaki prefecture.

Kuzu grows most rapidly during the summer, when the Horiko go deep into the mountains to locate and mark the possible kuzu harvesting areas. In the winter, when the leaves and vines fall back, they return to those marked areas for collecting the best roots. Kuzu harvesting is a very secretive operation; each harvester has his own turf like truffle harvesters in the West. All of Muso's kuzu is harvested from these wild plants that are at least 20 years old. In fact the Horiko will never dig young roots, leaving them for the future years. This is the unspoken rule among the Horiko, their way of showing respect and gratitude toward the natural blessings that are offered to them from the Kuzu roots.



Processing: alchemy for extracting white gold from Kuzu roots

After harvesting, the next step in creating kuzu starch is rinsing. This rinsing process is where Hirohachido demonstrates their 150 years of insight and expertise. The rinsing process at Hirohachido involves a natural process coupled with traditional methods--all without using any chemical substances. Each root is hand-cut into chunks that are crushed into fibers, soaked and rinsed, creating a thick brownish paste. The paste is repeatedly washed and filtered in cold mountain spring water until it becomes a pure white starch. The kuzu starch is then dried, crushed into small chunks, and packaged for distribution.