

Umeboshi

One of Japan's Most Ancient Super Foods



A Healthy Tradition

Ume (*Prunus mume*) is a fruit that's been commonly referred to as a plum but actually is a species of apricot. There's evidence of the Ume (originally called Ubai) having been used as a traditional medicine in China 2,000 years ago, as a dried smoked fruit. However, when the Japanese discovered the ume, they modified the processing methods and added two essential ingredients—salt and red shiso (beefsteak) leaves.

Since the 10th century, the Japanese have used Umeboshi as a healthy tonic, food preservative, antibacterial aid, and as an energy enhancer for Samurai warriors. There's a traditional Japanese saying that states: "By taking Umeboshi in the morning, you will be protected against evil spirits all day." For 1,000 years, Japanese cuisine and folk medicine included using the Umeboshi for purifying water, curing food poisoning, reducing fevers, and protection from fatigue, general malaise, and widespread diseases.



The Ume plum is harvested near the end of June when the plums are just beginning to develop their sweetness. The plums are cleaned, and then placed in large tubs with alternating layers of sea salt. The salt draws the juice from the plums and produces brine in the tubs. The plums begin their pickling while being submerged in the brine for two months. The ume plums are then removed, placed on racks and left outside to sun dry for three to five days depending on the weather. This sun-drying stage marks the official birth of "Umeboshi", which literally means dried ume. The Umeboshi are placed in vats where they mature for between several months up to one year. The coloring process begins when the matured Umeboshi are placed back in the brine along with alternating layers of red shiso leaves. They remain there for one to two months during which time their color changes from a sun-dried earthy color to pinkish-red.



From  Japan



Umeboshi drying racks during peak season.

Health Benefits

Umeboshi plums can be a unique culinary addition in your kitchen, providing an unusually salty, sour, and subtly sweet flavor to any foods you eat with them. They contain trace amounts of vitamin C, iron, potassium, and calcium. Like other types of pickled foods, Umeboshi are an excellent aid for digesting carbohydrates and proteins. In addition, they provide a wide range of health benefits that include:

- Reduces excessive stomach acid and the discomfort of indigestion.
- Aids digestion by increasing the production of salivary amylase, an essential digestive enzyme.
- Stimulates the salivary enzyme catalase, which protect body cells from oxidation.
- Strengthens the body's resistance to cough, flu, cold, fever and sore throat due to Umeboshi's potent natural antibacterial properties.
- Tonifies the liver while eliminating toxins.
- Aids in weight loss by increasing fat metabolism.
- Improves the absorption of iron and calcium.



There is a pit inside the Umeboshi plum called "Jin" that is an essential health component of this remarkable super food. Besides using this sour pit as an aid for neutralizing acid reflux, the kernel at the center of this pit (which can be extracted by using a nut cracker to break the hard shell which encases the kernel) is a fantastic tonic to eliminate fatigue and strengthen the immune system.

King of Alkaline Foods

Even after the pickling process, Umeboshi plums still contain considerable amounts of citric and phosphoric acids. This strong acidity has a paradoxical alkalizing affect on the blood, which is why Umeboshi is often referred to as "the King of Alkaline Foods." Stress, poor quality foods, strenuous exercise, and consumption of caffeinated beverages all contribute to an acidic blood quality. This acidic condition contributes to fatigue, irritability, muscle weakness, and joint pains. Umeboshi can help neutralize the pH of the blood, which will help improve health, vitality and general well-being. Because Umeboshi is regarded as one of the best preventive medicines available, Japanese nutritionists and traditional health practitioners claim that "An Umeboshi a day can keep the doctor away!"



About Shiso

Shiso, known as "perilla" or "beefsteak leaves," is the inseparable companion of Umeboshi. The redness of Umeboshi is imparted by the purple variety of shiso, which is rich in calcium, iron, potassium, zinc, vitamins E and K, and riboflavin. Shiso has strong anti-bacterial effects and is also considered to have anti-inflammatory properties.



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