



ひじきの煮付け

Soy-Braised *Hijiki* with Carrots and/or Fried *Tōfu*

Hijiki No Nitsuké

Hijiki No Nitsuké is especially popular on cafeteria menus and packed into many a child's lunchbox. This dish combines the bounty of the field – carrots and/or soy in the form of fried *tōfu* – with the bounty of the ocean – *hijiki*, a calcium and iron rich sea vegetable. This surf-and-turf notion of balancing the source of foodstuffs in menu planning is typical of Japan's indigenous food culture, *washoku*.

Hijiki no Nimono can be served on its own as a side dish or tossed in to rice; it can also get dressed in a thick, creamy *tōfu* sauce called *shira aé*.

4-6 portions

1/4 to 1/3 cup dried *hijiki* (black sea vegetable, preferably *mé hijiki*, the 'buds')

1 teaspoon vegetable oil (preferably aromatic sesame oil)

1 slice fried *tōfu* (*abura agé*), about 7 ounces, blanched, drained and thinly sliced

1 tablespoon *saké*

1 and 1/4 cups *Dashi*

1 tablespoon sugar

1 carrot, peeled and cut into julienne sticks, about 3/4 cup

2 to 3 tablespoons regular soy sauce (*shōyu*)

1 tablespoon white sesame, freshly toasted

Soak the *hijiki* in warm water to cover for 10-20 minutes. It will expand to many times its original volume so choose a large bowl. When soft, **drain & DISCARD** the deep brown liquid (do not consume) and pat away excess moisture.

Heat a skillet over high heat. Add the *hijiki*, stirring constantly. When dry and slightly aromatic (pleasantly reminiscent of the seashore) drizzle in the oil and sauté the *hijiki* vigorously for 1 minute. Add the fried *tōfu* and continue to sauté for 1 more minute. Drizzle in the *saké* and toss the contents of the skillet until it has evaporated. Add the sugar and one cup of the *dashi*. Lower the heat to maintain a steady, but not vigorous simmer. Cook, preferably with an *otoshi-buta* (dropped lid) for 7-8 minutes, or until nearly all the liquid is gone. Lift the *otoshi-buta* lid and add the carrots with the remaining 1/4 cup *dashi*. Replace the lid and simmer for 2-3 minutes.

Test a piece of *hijiki*; it should give easily when pinched. If it does not, continue to simmer for 3-4 minutes (adding a few drops of water, if needed to keep from scorching) or until tender. Do not add any soy sauce until the *hijiki* is tender.

Add 2 tablespoons of soy sauce and cook for 1-2 minutes until the liquid is nearly gone. Taste, and balance any unwanted sweetness by adding a few drops more soy sauce. Remove the skillet from the heat and let the *hijiki* cool to room temperature, with the dropped lid in place. Store the cooked *hijiki* mixture in whatever liquid remains.

Just before serving, drain off excess liquid, and coax the mixture into small mounds. Garnish each portion with a few whole toasted sesame seeds.

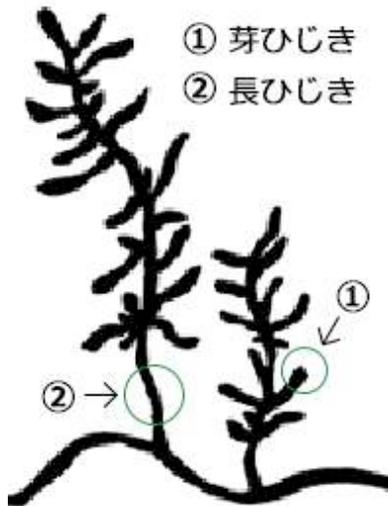
VARIATIONS on a theme... *hijiki* can be combined with a variety of other vegetables. Blanched green beans or snow peas sliced into thin julienne; blanched-and-shelled *édamamé*; *konnyaku* strips; lotus root. *Hijiki no nimono* is also delicious tossed in a creamy *tōfu* sauce (*shira aé*), tossed with *sushi* rice & stuffed into *inari* pouches; mixed with *tōfu* and made into *korokké* (croquettes); added to rolled omelet



SPECIAL NOTE on HIJIKI: In 2004 the British FSA (Food Standards Agency) placed a ban on the sale of *hijiki* in the United Kingdom with the explanation that the sea vegetable naturally contained levels of inorganic arsenic that made it unsafe for human consumption. Inorganic arsenic compounds are relatively toxic; organic arsenic, less so. In samples taken by Canadian authorities (Canadian Food Inspection Agency) other sea vegetables, including dulse, *nori*, and *kombu* registered low while *hijiki* was high in inorganic arsenic.

Both the CFIA and the FSA noted that levels were especially high in the liquid remaining after rehydrating the sea vegetable – which is why the Japanese **ALWAYS** have and always will **discard the liquid used to rehydrate *hijiki***, rinsing it again under fresh cold water, before cooking it. Unlike other Japanese sun-dried vegetables such as kelp, radish, mushrooms, or gourd that produce fabulous stocks when being rehydrated, the by-product of soaking *hijiki* should NOT be consumed.

The Japanese Ministry of Health and Welfare has tried to provide information to reassure an international public that *hijiki* can be consumed safely, if prepared properly and not eaten in excessively large portions (though delicious, it is unlikely that any one person would continue to eat the equivalent of six portions of this dish several times a week for a lifetime). *Hijiki* has been an excellent source of calcium, iron, and dietary fiber for the Japanese for thousands of years. It also taste great!



#1 *me hijiki* the “buds” (tender leaves)
#2 *naga hijiki* “long” hijiki (branches)

below: DRIED *me hijiki* (left), softened & drained (right)

