

Kōya-Dōfu no Taki Awasé
高野豆腐の炊き合わせ

Successively-Simmered, *Kōya-Dōfu* & Vegetables



Foods prepared in the *taki awasé* (successively-simmered) style are a mainstay of Japanese cookery. On vegetarian menus, broth-absorbing *kōya-dōfu* is commonly simmered with dried *shiitaké* mushrooms, then root vegetables (successively added to the pot), allowing woody and earthy flavors to mingle and gradually intensify. Sometimes pumpkins such as *kabocha* are included. Home cooks typically use the same pot for the *kōya-dōfu* and all the vegetables, allowing flavors to meld. Chefs in elegant restaurants will take care to maintain the integrity (distinct flavor profile) of each vegetable by simmering the items separately before combining them with the *kōya-dōfu*. In both cases, the final assortment is artistically arranged, landscape style, with taller foods at back (imagine “mountains”) and smaller items in the foreground.

4 portions

4 blocks *kōya-dōfu*, each about 1/2 ounce (about 16 grams)

4 dried *shiitaké* mushrooms

1-inch piece of *kombu*

4-6 ounces (about 150 grams) *kabocha* (seeds removed and cut into 8 pieces, beveled and trimmed)

OR

4-6 ounces (about 150 grams) carrots, scraped or peeled and cut into 8 pieces, batons or roll-cut wedges

1 and 1/2 tablespoons *saké*

Scant 1 tablespoon sugar

1 and 1/2 tablespoons *usukuchi shōyu* (light-colored soy sauce)

1 tablespoon *mirin* (syrupey rice wine)

20 green beans or snow peas, briefly blanched



SOFTEN *Kōya-Dōfu* Place the blocks of dried *kōya-dōfu* in a single layer in a container. Add lukewarm water (no hotter than 50°C/122°F) to barely cover the *kōya-dōfu*. The blocks will swell in about a minute; flip them over. Add a bit more warm water to the container to enable the blocks to barely float. Soak for another minute.

Remove the *kōya-dōfu* pieces one at a time to a bowl of fresh, cold water to rinse them. Lift the *kōya-dōfu* from the cold water and place between the palms of your hands. Press carefully but firmly to press out the water. If the water is cloudy, re-soak and press again. When fully softened, cut each square piece in half, lengthwise OR on the diagonal to make triangular pieces.

EXTRACT STOCK from the dried mushrooms while preparing them for further cooking: Break off the stems and set them aside for making stock on another occasion. Here you are using only the caps to make stock – and cooking the caps to include in the final dish. Soak the caps and *kombu* in 3 cups water for at least 30 minutes and preferably an hour or more. Do not worry if the *kombu* develops blisters; its a sign that *kombu*'s flavor-boosting amino acids have been released into the stock.



Remove the *kombu* from the water to a wide, shallow pot. Remove the mushroom caps from the soaking liquid and rinse them briefly to remove any gritty material. If large, slice the mushrooms in half *sogi-giri* (on the diagonal, slant-cut). Gently squeeze out water and add the softened mushroom cap pieces to the pot.

Pour the soaking liquid through a fine-mesh strainer into a quart-sized container. This liquid is now your cooking stock. Pour one cup of cooking stock into the pot over the mushrooms; season with *saké* and sugar.

Over medium heat, bring the liquid to a simmer. Skim away froth with a fine-mesh strainer (both the mushrooms and the *kombu* produce quite a bit of froth). Cook the mushrooms, covered with an *otoshi-buta* (dropped lid) or cooking parchment for 7 or 8 minutes. If at any point the mushrooms (or later, the other vegetables and *kōya-dōfu*) seem in danger of scorching, add a bit more cooking stock (or water).

Remove the lid, move the mushrooms to the side and add the *kabocha* (skin side down) or carrots to the pot. Replace the lid and cook for 3 or 4 minutes, until barely tender (a toothpick meets little resistance).

Remove the lid, move the vegetables aside to make room for the *kōya-dōfu* (arrange in a single layer); season with *usukuchi shōyu* and *mirin*. Swirl the pot to be sure flavors are distributed evenly. Add more cooking stock as needed to keep ingredients moist. Replace the lid and cook for 1 minute. Lift the lid, flip the pieces of *kōya-dōfu* over and replace the lid. Let the ingredients cool naturally (about 20 minutes); the *kōya-dōfu* will soak up the cooking broth as it cools. It is during this cooling-down period that flavors deepen and meld.

If not serving immediately, cover and refrigerate for up to 2 days. When ready to serve, bring back to room temperature (that is how this dish is served in Japan) or re-heat gently. Since there will be little or no liquid you will need to add more stock. The simplest to make is Kelp Alone Stock made by placing a piece of *kombu* in a glass jar with water to cover. Let the *kombu* soak for at least 20 minutes and up to several hours.

PANTRY NOTES



Left: Asahi Matsu brand; right: Misuzu brand

高野豆腐 *Kōya-Dōfu* (freeze-dried *tōfu*) is likely to be a new ingredient for you. Although it sounds like a modern invention, it is an old-fashioned pantry item. Originally, the freezing and drying took place naturally: loaves of *tōfu* were set out at night in frigid temperatures, then allowed to dry in the sun during the day. This process transformed perishable *tōfu* into a shelf-stable food. Classic Japanese *kōya-dōfu* dishes are made by first softening the blocks in water, then simmering them in a soy-tinged broth. This results in chewy-textured, juicy bits of protein.

Kōya-dōfu can also be grated (it looks somewhat like a hard cheese) and used in lieu of breadcrumbs to mix with meat (or other vegetables). *Kōya-dōfu* is a soy food and is gluten-free.

