

内祝い、ちらし寿司 *Uchi Iwai, Chirashi-Zushi*

Home Celebration SCATTERED-STYLE SUSHI



Chirashi-zushi is served on many occasions; it is typically a homemade dish intended to feed family and friends who have gathered to celebrate some happy event. In March, HINA MATSURI (“Doll’s Festival”) is a celebration for young girls, in May, KODOMO NO HI (“Children’s Day”) is now celebrated by both boys and girls (originally it was just for boys). In July there is TANABATA (“Star Festival” based on an ancient Chinese legend – cold noodles are the most popular dish for this festival but *chirashi-zushi* also appears on many family tables and in children’s lunch boxes) and in November SHICHI-GO-SAN (“Seven-Five-Three” Festival for three and seven-year old girls and five-year old boys) celebrates the growth and well-being of children. *Chirashi-zushi* is often on the menu for *Sejin Shiki* (Coming of Age ceremonies) and *Kanreki* (celebrating a 60th birthday), too.

One reason why *chirashi-zushi* is such a popular choice for home celebrations is the ease with which portion size can be adjusted. Suddenly have 4 or 5 more people? No problem: Cook another 2 cups of rice, season with sweet vinegar and toss in with what you previously made. The original toppings can be stretched to cover extra portions. Another reason *chirashi-zushi* is served at home parties is the fact that most components (the thin omelets, the pickled vegetables and soy-simmered fried *tōfu* and sea vegetables can be made days ahead (and refrigerated) and assembled quickly on the day of the party to serve a crowd. Yet another reason is the opportunity for the home cook to lavish artistic energy on the final display. Here are several examples of platters of *chirashi-zushi*:



Garnishes can be placed in segmented areas in wedges or stripes... or gathered into clusters...



Or scattered at random...



Sushi rice can be molded into decorative shapes; diamond shapes are a motif associated with Hina Matsuri.... as are small pom-pom like bite-sized balls called *temari-zushi* and layered “cakes.”



When taking some sushi from a large platter, most people create a scattered or clustered arrangement on their plate

Scattered-style sushi is an assemblage of many components. You can make the final platter as complex, or simple, as you want. Examples are shown above. For nutritional balance and aesthetic harmony, be mindful of the **WASHOKU principles** and include:

- **5 colors** (red, yellow, green, black and white)
- **5 flavors** (sweet, sour, salty, with accents of bitter and spicy)
- **5 methods of preparation** (simmered, seared, fried, steamed, raw)

Su meshi (tartly seasoned sushi rice) is white-colored; the rice is prepared by a combination of simmering and steaming. The seasoned vinegar used to dress the rice melds tart and sweet and salty flavors. Tossing the seasoned rice with toasted sesame seeds (a “bitter” accent that could be either black, or white, and is seared with heat when toasted) and minced pink or red pickled ginger provides a “spicy” accent.

Soy-Simmered *Shiitaké* Slices satisfies the sweet and salty guidelines for flavor balance, and its dark color qualifies for “black.” Tossing in Soy-Simmered Hijiki, Carrots and Fried *Tōfu* in to the sushi rice adds red color (carrots) and fried as a method (Fried *Tōfu*) to our menu. The pickled ginger qualifies as “spicy” and as red (pink, red and purple all “count” as red on the menu). Chrysanthemum petals are vivid purple and bright yellow; omelet ribbons are also yellow.

Finally, you will need something green – there are lots of possibilities: freshly shelled and briefly blanched peas, *édamamé* (green soybeans, available frozen in many stores), asparagus or green beans (blanched and sliced into thin slivers) are just a few suggestions. If you are looking to satisfy the bitter element in your menu, consider briefly blanched bitter greens such as *shungiku* (dandelion) or even kale.

ASSEMBLING CHIRASHI-ZUSHI

Toss *su meshi** with toasted sesame seeds, **soy-simmered hijiki, carrots & fried tōfu***, drained and finely minced pink or red pickled ginger. Use light tossing, cutting and folding motions to distribute evenly. Lightly mound the rice mixture on a large platter. The dish can be assembled to this point 4-5 hours in advance of serving as long as it is covered snugly with clear plastic wrap and kept away from extremes of hot or cold. Just before serving, scatter toppings and garnishes. Many households include omelet ribbons; those wanting to keep the menu vegan will often include *hoshi yuba* (dried sheets of soy milk) or **kōya-dōfu*** ("freeze-dried" tōfu) instead. Soy-Simmered *Shiitaké* slices garnish many platters of *chirashi-zushi*. Whatever green vegetable you use (snow peas, asparagus, fresh soy beans) should be added last because prolonged contact with sushi rice turns green items an unattractive brownish color. Serve the platter of *chirashi-zushi* at room temperature.

* **RECIPES** for these components provided as separate documents.



ABOVE: Seasoned Sushi Rice; Soy-Simmered *Hijiki*, Carrots and Fried *Tōfu*; Soy-Simmered *Shiitaké* and *Kōya-Dōfu*. BELOW: Pink Pickled Ginger, fresh green soy beans, Pink & White Pickled Lotus Root; Pickled Chrysanthemum Petals, Yellow & Purple



Left: Omelet Ribbons