

Miso Soup with Shiitake Mushrooms and Celeriac

Serves 4-6 | 20 minutes prep + 60 minutes cook time

Miso, one of my favorite umami-boosters, gets its flavor through the ancient dance of enzymes, starches, and sugars that give fermented foods such complex blends of sweet and savory. The Chinese brought the prototypical bean paste to Japan nearly 1300 years ago, and the island's koji-friendly humidity, umami-receptive eaters, and food-producing artisans have been perfecting the pasty blend of soybeans, rice, and salt ever since.

They say that most Japanese people eat miso soup every day. While it's considered one of the fundamentals of Japanese cuisine, there are endless variations of miso soup. On this side of the Pacific we typically think of the thin miso soup served at restaurants, with a couple of tofu cubes and some slices of green onion. But lots of things can go in the dashi broth that gets a generous scoop of miso at the end.

My version uses a mushroom dashi made with dried shiitakes, but the traditional seaweed-bonito version works just as well. While most soups benefit from a long simmer, this one is ready quickly and delicious from the get-go.

4 dried shiitake mushrooms

**2 pieces dried kombu seaweed,
appx 4 inches square**

6 cups water

**1 lb fresh shiitake mushrooms,
stems* removed, sliced**

**1 celeriac, peeled and cut into
bite-sized pieces**

**1 leek, quartered lengthwise
and cut into ½ inch slices**

**1 large carrot, halved
lengthwise and cut into ½ inch
slices**

2 tablespoons soy sauce

¼ cup sake

¼ cup mirin

**1 tablespoon Okinawan brown
sugar**

¼ cup Jorinji white miso

Step 1 Combine the dried mushrooms, seaweed, and water in a stockpot. Bring to a boil, cover, and simmer for 30 minutes. Remove the mushrooms, cut off the stems, slice and return to the broth. Remove and discard the seaweed. You can make the dashi ahead of time and store in the fridge for a few days.

Step 2 Add all the remaining ingredients except the miso to the pot, return to a boil, reduce heat, cover, and simmer for 30 minutes or until the root vegetables are tender.

Step 3 Put the miso in a small bowl, add a few spoonfuls of the soup broth, and stir well. Mix the miso-broth mixture back into the soup and let it heat, but not boil, what's called niebana or boiling flower, supposedly for the way the ingredients look like a blooming flower just before they boil. Letting the soup boil after the miso's been added changes the flavor, aroma, and healthful qualities of the miso. Take the soup off heat once you get to niebana.

*woody shiitake stems are tough,
but they can be chopped very
fine and added to the soup