



# Home



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**Easy peasy:** Japanese food can be quick, easy and fun

## Give it a gyoza...

Former MasterChef winner Tim Anderson convinces **Claire Coleman** that Japanese cooking doesn't have to be difficult

CHEF Tim Anderson is on a mission to prove cooking Japanese food really isn't that hard. 'Lots of people are intimidated by it, but so many of the recipes are inherently simple,' he insists. 'Sashimi is the best example – it's just raw fish sliced with soy sauce. But a lot of Japanese cuisine is in a similar vein:

get a good piece of fish or veg and apply a simple seasoning, such as miso, soy, dashi – there's not a lot of slow cooking, or tricky techniques, just serve it with salad, rice, and miso soup and it's done.'

Anderson, a 33-year-old American who became obsessed with Japanese cookery when he watched Iron Chef on TV as a teenager, rose to fame when he won

MasterChef in 2011. He went on to host a series of pop-ups before opening his own restaurant Nanban, in Brixton, and admits his new recipe book about simple Japanese food wasn't his idea.

'I pitched my publishers a completely different cookbook about weird ingredients, but they suggested something that demystified Japanese food. For me

it was a no-brainer. Of course, if you want to make something that's the standard of the best restaurants in Japan, it's not straightforward and actually ramen and some of the dishes we make in the restaurant would be difficult to reproduce at home, but the simple stuff is the sort of food that I cook at home. I said yes, as long as I could call the book JapanEasy.'

Carried by Anderson's laid-back and reassuring style, JapanEasy came to life. You realise he's got a point when he debunks the idea that it's hard to get the ingredients – 'there aren't that many and there's the internet!' – and that it takes ages to learn and a long time to make.

Every recipe has a difficulty

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rating although Tim considers most of them 'not that difficult'. But there must be some hard ones in there?

'Gyoza can be tricky,' he concedes. 'Not difficult, but fiddly, but anyone can make them and although they might not be pretty they will still be delicious. And your sushi rolls might fall apart, but they will still taste good.'

For the absolute beginner, he suggests the sweet miso-glazed aubergine. 'It's simple, vegetarian and a real crowd pleaser. You don't need to be cooking a Japanese meal to have it. It works with lots of food. At the restaurant we've been playing around with a Mediterranean fusion, putting it with pomegranates, grilled lamb and a simple salad. That's a great meal.'

Tim's favourite recipes in the book include fried rice and yaki soba. 'You can put anything in them – any vegetables, or leftovers from a roast dinner work really well. They're the recipes that have been with me the longest because they are so easy. They're the sort of thing I cook at home.'

He rails against the idea that you need any special equipment for cooking Japanese food. 'You don't need a sushi mat or a deep fat fryer. You need probably three knives – a chef's knife, a paring knife and a boning knife, and a heavy pan that distributes heat evenly. That's it.'

Tim may have just dispatched any excuses for not cooking Japanese food at home.

'It's fun, quick, easy and you can get the ingredients,' he says. 'And if it goes wrong, which it won't, you're just cooking at home, so it doesn't matter!'

**Life in Tokyo:** Tim has been interested in Japanese food since he was a teenager



## SWEET MISO SAUCE

Makes about 180ml

- 100g miso
- 2 tablespoons mirin
- 2 tablespoons of caster (superfine) or granulated (raw) sugar
- 1 tablespoon water or sake
- ½ teaspoon vinegar

### DIFFICULTY

As not difficult as it is delicious, which is to say: incredibly not difficult.

### Tim's tip...

'Buy Japanese soy – I put it in almost everything. I prefer it to salt and rice wine vinegar. It gives a great clean acidity; I prefer it to Chinese as they do taste different, but the brands that you see in supermarkets – Kikkoman, Clearspring – are generally good.'

This sauce, or minor variations thereof, is perhaps the most used weapon in my Japanese arsenal. Its main

flavour is the overall awesomeness

of miso, rounded out with notes of sweetness and acidity.

It is great on everything (try it on buttered toast, for real) as either a marinade or a sauce, but its flavour becomes deeper and sweeter as it caramelises, so I like it especially in foods that are grilled or baked – such as the sweet miso-glazed aubergine (below).

Generally speaking, you should use white miso for this if you're planning to use it on fish, tofu or lighter-flavoured vegetables and you should use red miso if you're planning to use it on meat or meaty vegetables like aubergine or mushrooms.

But, really, both kinds will work pretty well on just about anything, so whatever miso you prefer will be absolutely fine for a very wide range of dishes.

### METHOD

Stir all the ingredients together until the sugar has dissolved. This will keep in the fridge more or less indefinitely.

■ Recipes taken from *JapanEasy* by Tim Anderson (Hardie Grant, £20)

### Tim's tip...

'Your fishmonger will probably get you the freshest, best stuff for sushi, but the big supermarkets are really risk averse – they don't want wastage or poisoning so most of the fish you'll buy there is not only safe, but also pretty good.'

## NASU DENGAKU: SWEET MISO-GLAZED AUBERGINE

### SERVES 4

- 2 aubergines
- Oil for shallow-frying
- 120–150 ml sweet miso sauce (see above)
- Toasted sesame seeds to garnish

### DIFFICULTY

So not difficult you'll wonder why you've never made it before. So many people I speak to name this absolute classic as one of their favourite Japanese dishes, which makes me very happy. It's not sexy like sushi, it's not complicated like ramen, and in fact it is even a little ugly. So I love that people get so excited

about it – it's got none of the pretence or the showiness that Japanese food is often expected to have. It's just pure, concentrated deliciousness: fudgy aubergine with a profoundly delicious caramelised miso sauce.

### METHOD

**1** Cut the aubergines in half lengthways and score the flesh in a diamond pattern, about 5mm deep. This will help them cook evenly and absorb the glaze.

**2** Pour the oil into a deep frying pan to a depth of about 1cm and heat over

a medium heat.

**3** Add the aubergines and fry for about five minutes on each side until the flesh has browned and softened and the skin has become glossy and brittle.

**4** Carefully remove from the oil and drain well on kitchen paper.

**5** Spoon the sweet miso sauce onto the scored side of each aubergine and place under a hot grill for five to ten minutes; the glaze should bubble and brown and fuse with the aubergine.

**6** Garnish with sesame seeds and serve.



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