

Reading and Talking

Pot-baked sweet potatoes

“Ishi yaki imo” sweet potatoes are baked slowly on hot stones. Another way to slow-cook sweet potatoes is “tsubo yaki imo.” Red-hot charcoal is put at the bottom of a large clay pot, and the sweet potatoes bake in the charcoal’s heat for two hours. Today, only one person makes tsubo yaki imo pots. Kengo Maekawa, who is 73, makes Tokoname yaki (常滑焼) pottery in Gifu Prefecture. He needs one week to make one sweet-potato-baking pot. Each pot costs 220,000 yen, and there is a three-month waiting list to buy one.

(96 words)

Which do you like better, chestnuts or sweet potatoes?

↳ I like both. (--Do you like “imokenpi” candied sweet potato sticks? / Do you like Mont Blanc chestnut cream cake?)

↳ I like [XXX] better. (--Why do you like them better? / Do you like persimmons?)

↳ I don’t like either. (--Why don’t you like them? / Do you like pumpkin?)

Have you eaten persimmons this autumn yet?

↳ Yes, I have. (--How did you eat them? / Do you like dried persimmons?)

↳ No, I haven’t. (--Do you like persimmons? / What’s your favorite autumn fruit?)

Have you worn a sweater this autumn yet?

↳ Yes, I have. (--When did you wear it? / Have you started wearing a winter coat yet? / Have you started wearing a scarf around your neck yet?)

↳ No, I haven’t. (--Have you worn a short-sleeved shirt recently? / Are you using warm “futon” bedding now? / Do you like winter?)

(27 November, 2020)

More Information

Pot-baked sweet potatoes

“Ishi yaki imo!” (sweet potatoes baked on hot stones), is a street-seller’s cry that conjures up autumns gone by. Vendors pushed carts with wood-fired ovens through neighborhoods, and they stopped to sell their wares. The sweet potatoes were cooked slowly on hot stones inside the oven so that they stayed moist, and the sugars deep inside the potatoes rose to the surface.

There is another traditional way to slow-cook sweet potatoes: “tsubo yaki imo.” Red-hot charcoal is placed at the bottom of a large ceramic pot. Metal baskets to hold the sweet potatoes are hung above the charcoal, and the potatoes bake over the low heat for up to two hours.

Today, only one person makes tsubo yaki imo ceramic pots. Kengo Maekawa, who is 73, is a master of Tokoname yaki (常滑焼) pottery in Tokoname, Gifu Prefecture. Until recently, he sold three sweet-potato-baking pots a year. Then a ceramic-pot-baked sweet potato store opened in Ginza, Tokyo, and his pots became sought after. It takes Maekawa a week to make one sweet-potato-baking pot. They cost ¥220,000 each, and at the moment there is a three-month waiting list to buy one.

(194 words)

(27 November, 2020)

Reading and Talking

Strawberry Vinegar

Seika is a strawberry-growing town in Kyoto Prefecture. Tadashi Kobayashi has a flower shop there. After he started selling strawberry tea, a Kyoto vinegar company, Kuramoto Nakano Shoten (蔵元中野商店), told him that strawberry vinegar might also taste good. Kobayashi added strawberry juice to Nakano Shoten's vinegar. He called his strawberry vinegar Hana Ichigo (華苺). You can put it in yoghurt, mix it with sparkling water or hot water, or add it to "mugi" barley shochu. Hana Ichigo costs 1,890 yen (140 grams) or 7,344 yen (560 grams).

(99 words)

Do you want to buy Hana Ichigo strawberry-flavored vinegar?

↳Yes, I do. / Kind of. (--What do you think about the price? / What do you think about the name? / How do you want to use it?)

↳No, I don't. (--How come you don't want to buy it? / Have you ever tried herb or fruit-flavored vinegar? / Can you think of another fruit-flavored vinegar?)

Do you like "pakuchi" cilantro?

↳Yes, I do. (--What's your favorite dish with cilantro? / Do you like "shungiku" edible chrysanthemum leaf?)

↳No, I don't. (--Do you like "goya" bitter melon? / Do you like matcha-flavored desserts? / Can you eat green peppers?)

Have you bought strawberry jam recently?

↳Yes, I have. (--When and where did you buy it? / How do you use strawberry jam? / Have you ever made strawberry jam?)

↳No, I haven't. (--What do you spread on your toast? / When you have pancakes, what do you put on them? / What's your favorite jam?)

(27 November, 2020)

More Information

Strawberry Vinegar

Seika is a town in the south of Kyoto Prefecture. It has a population of 36,000, and it is known for its strawberry farms. Tadashi Kobayashi runs the Green Harmony flower shop in the town. He is also something of an entrepreneur. After Kobayashi started selling strawberry-flavored tea, the president of a Kyoto vinegar brewery, Kuramoto Nakano Shoten (蔵元中野商店), suggested to Kobayashi that strawberries might also go well with vinegar.

To make a long story short, Kobayashi managed to buy enough strawberries to make 130 liters of strawberry juice. It was added to Kuramoto Nakano Shoten's vinegar, and aged for two months. The resulting strawberry-flavored vinegar was named Hana Ichigo (華莓).

Vinegar has many health benefits. Although vinegar is sour, if you sip Hana Ichigo straight, it has the sweetness of strawberry jam. You can add a spoonful to yoghurt, dilute it in sparkling or hot water, or add it to “mugi” barley shochu. A small bottle (140 grams) of Hana Ichigo is ¥1,890, and a large bottle (560 grams) is ¥7,344. It is not currently available online, but for more information, contact Green Harmony <<http://www.g-harmony.com/>>

(189 words)

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