

Kenchinjiru

6 to 8 hearty servings

8 cups (2l) **vegan dashi stock**, or 8 cups of water with vegan (konbu seaweed based) dashi granules

3 medium carrots

12 inch/ 30 cm length of burdock root or gobo

8 inch / 25 cm piece of daikon radish

6 to 8 raw shiitake mushrooms

3 large or 4 medium **taro root (satoimo)** or 3 medium potatoes

1 block (10 oz / 250g) firm tofu

1 small block **konnyaku** (optional)

1 tbs. dark sesame oil

2 tsp. sea salt

2 tbs. soy sauce

sansho or black pepper

Put the dashi stock in a large pot and heat it up as you prep the vegetables and so on.

Peel the burdock root (a peeler is the most handy thing for this) and slice on the diagonal as thinly as you can manage. Put into a bowl of cold water to get rid of any bitterness, and to stop it from turning black.

Peel the carrots and daikon radish, and cut lengthwise into half. Slice fairly thinly (thicker than the burdock, around 1/8 inch / 1/4 cm thickness).

Cut the stems off the shiitake mushrooms, and slice the caps into halves or quarters. Alternatively, leave them whole and make a crisscross decorative cut on the top of the caps, as shown in the photo.

Take the konnyaku out of the packaging and drain off the smelly water, Cut in half lengthwise, then slice thinly. Blanch in boiling water for a few minutes, then drain into a colander.

Peel the taro root or potatoes, and cut into chunks. Note that taro root is slimy, so leave this task until you've cut everything else up, since your cutting board will have to be washed afterwards anyway!

Drain the tofu well in a colander, then put it in the middle of a clean kitchen towel or a few layers of paper towel. Gather the towel around the tofu, and squeeze gently to get rid of excess water. Open up the towel, and crumble the tofu up with your hands, so that it looks like scrambled egg.

Heat up a large frying pan or wok with the sesame oil over high heat. Add the drained burdock root and stir fry for 2-3 minutes, then add the other vegetables, konnyaku and tofu. Stir fry for 4-5 minutes, put it all in the pot with the heated dashi stock. Add 1 tsp. salt, and lower the heat so that the soup is just very gently bubbling. simmer for 15 to 20 minutes until the vegetables are tender. Periodically skim off any scum that forms on top of the soup as it cooks. Top up with more dashi or water if there seems to be too little.

Add the soy sauce, and taste; it may or may not need more salt or soy sauce. Add some if you think it needs it.

Serve in large soup bowls rather than small Japanese miso soup bowls. My mother used to have a set of extra-large bowls just for kenchinjiru. Optionally sprinkle on a little sansho or black pepper.

Variations

Miso soup variation

As you can see, this is a clear soup, not a miso soup (not all Japanese soups have miso!) You can add miso if you like. Add about 3/4 cup of miso to start, and add more if you think it's needed. Omit the salt and reduce the soy sauce to 2 tablespoons.