

Natto— Traditional Japanese Health Food 日本の伝統的健康食—納豆

Series 1: What is this very popular food amongst many Japanese families called Natto?

第一回 日本の家庭で大人気の納豆とは？

Natto is fermented soybeans that are unique to Japanese diet. Natto has been popular among the Japanese for hundreds of years because it is packed with nutrition and health benefits. It is well known that soybeans are well-balanced food that contains five main nutrients: protein, sugar, fat, vitamin and minerals. The nature has provided us with a wonderful process called fermentation. And it is this fermentation that promotes the digestive process of soybeans and creates "Nattokinase", an enzyme beneficial in preventing blood clot that is gaining recent public attention. This process also enhances soybeans' nutritional value such as vitamin B and K.

Japan receives a lot of rain and is consequently very humid, and its islands are very mountainous, with only 20% of its area flatland. It is believed that it was by the Kamakura period that rice, and the technique of its cultivation, spread throughout the whole of Japan, as well as the raising of soy beans began. The basis of Japanese food is a combination of food from the mountain, the field, and the ocean. At that time, the Japanese people did not consume meat or milk as doing so was in opposition to the teachings of Buddhism, so their principal source of animal protein was seafood, but since learning to raise soy beans, they found soy contains a lot of high quality protein, whereupon they set a high value on the bean. They made rice fields in the limited flatlands, starting the Japanese-style intensive management of agriculture. They raised rice in the wet fields and soy beans on the berms of those fields, for soy has deep roots, making the berms stronger and able to hold the water better, so much so that the rice in turn grows stronger and better. Soy beans contain many organic nutrients, such as isoflavones, lecithin, alimentary fiber, saponin, linoleic acid, vitamins, minerals, and, of course, protein. It is still considered healthy food and is used often in the Japanese daily diet.

The annual household consumption of Natto in Japan amounts to approximately \$17 billion (according to the 2006 estimate by Japan Natto Cooperative Society Federation). Natto has a very unique texture, taste and flavor and is ever popular among the Japanese as "healthy, natural, traditional and nutritional food". We will be featuring this super food "Natto" in 12 series.

納豆とは、大豆を発酵させた日本特有の食べ物です。納豆は何百年も前から「栄養が豊富」で且つ「健康効果がある」という理由で日本人の間で親しまれてきました。大豆はご存じの通り、タンパク質・糖質・脂質・ビタミン・ミネラルの「5大栄養素」をバランス良く含んだ食材です。納豆はその大豆の持つ栄養素を、「発酵」という自然が我々に与えてくれたすばらしい過程を経て、大豆そのものの消化吸收を助け、そして近年注目されている血栓予防に効果のある酵素「納豆キナーゼ」、そしてビタミンBやKなどの栄養素を多く生み出してくれます。

日本は雨が多く多湿であり平地率も20%程度しかない、云わば山岳列島です。この国に米などの稲作農耕文化が普及し、大豆を栽培し始めたのは鎌倉時代からといわれています。和食の基本は山、畑、海の物の組み合わせです。当時、仏教の教えから、肉や牛乳を摂らない日本人は動物性タンパク質を魚介類に求めますが、大豆の栽培を始めてから、その中に含まれる良質タンパク質が「栄養食」として重視されました。少ない平地に水田を作り、「日本の集約型農業」が出来ました。水田に稲を植え、畔(あぜ)に大豆を蒔くと、大豆はしっかりと根を張り、土を補強しながら水田の水持ちを良くし、稲も丈夫に育ちます。大豆にはたんぱく質の他にイソフラボン、レシチン、食物繊維、サポニン、リノール酸、ビタミン、ミネラル他の有機成分が多く含まれています。そして現在でも「健康食」として毎日の日本人の食生活に引き継がれています。

日本における納豆の家庭での年間消費量は金額にして約170億ドル(2006年度概算/全国納豆協同組合連合会)にも上ります。その食感・味わい・風味には独特の物がありますが、この日本人が愛してやまない「健康食・自然食・伝統食・栄養食」であるスーパーフード「納豆」を本連載では12回にわたりご紹介します。



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Natto Recipe Example

It is best to eat Natto as is. In fact, in Japan, it is customary to eat "Natto on top of steamed rice". In the U.S., some people might have seen Natto used in "Natto Rolls" at some sushi restaurants. To those who like to experience Natto in variety of ways, we would like to recommend some recipe ideas.

Open-face Natto Sandwich

Ingredients

- 1 slice country-style bread 2 tablespoons Natto, chopped
- 2 teaspoons mayonnaise Salt and black pepper
- Curry powder

Cooking method 調理法

1. Put Natto, mayonnaise and pinch of curry powder in a small bowl and mix well.
2. Season with salt and pepper.
3. Spread Natto paste on bread and grill in toaster oven or broil until golden brown.

納豆を使ったレシピ例

納豆は、生のまま食べるのが一番良いとされています。実際日本では、「ご飯に生の納豆」というのが慣習になっています。しかしアメリカでは「納豆ロール」などを寿司レストランでしか見たことが無い人も多いでしょう。ここではもっとバラエティー豊かな納豆料理を体験したい人におすすめのレシピを紹介しています。

