



Fun, social dining for long winter evenings

This year make a hotpot at home!

When it comes to classic cooking for the cooler months, nabe hotpot dishes win hands down. This year nabe dining at home has become especially popular. Healthy and economical, it's a great dish to gather round and strengthen those family ties; just being with people you can relax with is fun. Spending this winter exploring the tempting tastes of nabe cooking sounds like a splendid idea...

Photos (people/food) / Susumu Nagao Text / JQR editors

Ingredients

Prawns, clams, white fish (cod), chicken thighs, thinly sliced pork loin, Chinese cabbage, shiitake mushrooms, leeks, carrots, citron, tofu, shungiku (edible chrysanthemum leaves)

Method

- ① De-vein prawns and parboil in water to which salt and sake have been added. Remove stems from shiitake and sear lightly. Prep using a suitable method any ingredients that require the removal of acrid taste.
- ② Fill a ceramic casserole with stock, and float citron peel on top. The stock is a combination of ichiban and niban dashi (first and second batches of stock from the stock ingredients), but commercial stock base will do, or even just water.
- ③ Add the clams, and when the shells open add the chicken, then the vegetables, starting with the hardest. When cooked through, remove, divide into servings, then add the pork, prawns and white fish.
- ④ When all ingredients have been removed and divided up, last of all add cooked rice. When the mixture comes to the boil, add beaten egg and simmer to make zosui (rice broth).

{Yosenabe}

Brimming with delectable surf-and-turf delights, yosenabe is the most decadent of hotpots. The photo here with its plethora of ingredients is sure to whet the appetite, but if added all at once, some may become overcooked and lose their flavor. To enjoy the individual tastes, add ingredients in small quantities to ensure each is cooked just right.

Delicious, adventurous nabe cuisine





Flavor-your-own, create-your-own nabe options on the rise!

Word has it that the traditional Japanese nabe hotpot has acquired a radical new look lately. We talked to two professionals about recent developments on the frontline of this remarkable evolution in nabe cooking. So what does the "new and improved" nabe taste like?

Photos (people/food) Susumu Nagao

“A little extra effort makes all the difference”



Tanehide Egami

Executive Producer, Ecole De Cuisine Egami. Dietary educator. After working for a food manufacturer, turned to the design and development of foodstuffs, food venues and events. Director, TALK-TLC; Director, the Food Coordinator Association.

G: A family I know are already eating just about nothing but nabe.

Egami: Mmm, I can see why that might be.

G: The wife likes nabe because it's quick to prepare and clear away, and warms everyone up. But her husband is apparently getting sick of it, because she always flavors the nabe with ponzu.

E: I do things like grind in curry spices to vary the taste.

G: Using a spice mill?

E: Yes, you just grind on this fragrant curry powder like pepper. If you start to get a little tired of the same flavor, just a quick twist of the spice mill and voila! "Curry nabe".

G: I've noticed that nabe with a selection of dipping sauces is all the rage this year.

E: Yes – personally I like green Tabasco sauce too. Place a little on the serving plate for just the right amount of bite and Tabasco hotness – it tastes pretty good actually.

Maximize satisfaction by developing the flavors you like the way you like them

JQR: Heresy surely?!

E: I don't think there's any such thing as heresy when it comes to nabe. I get the feeling people are getting tired of the same flavor from start to finish, and so are rapidly starting to add their own favorites, in the quantities they want.

G: Which is more of a treat when you think about it, isn't it? In that sense the Japanese do like new things.

E: Well, I wonder. Maybe we do tire of things quickly.

JQR: But nabe is a traditional dish, surely?

G: People don't do the traditional sort of nabe at home though.

E: That's true. These days it's more a case of just combining all sorts of things and tucking in.

JQR: Instant-type nabe mixes seem to be a frequent choice these days.

G: Because they're quick and simple.

E: The package always says what you can make to finish: tan-tan (dandan) noodles, risotto, udon broth... Without that final course (shime) I guess people don't feel they've truly "done" nabe.

JQR: Why is dining on nabe at home so popular this year?

E: Well a lot has happened this year, which I think is turning people back to the idea of dining as a family.

G: That's right.

E: Because they're eating at home more often, people are gaining a new appreciation of nabe as a meal that's easy and fun to share with friends and family.

G: Plus there's the health aspect. Nabe is a good source of vegetables, and you can flavor it any way you like. I think that's a big part of it too.

E: There's the reassurance of being able to see with your own eyes what goes into the pot. And it's cheaper.

Convenient options speed up the nabe evolution

G: There are a lot more "nabe" products out there now, I see.

E: That's right. Go to the supermarket and you'll find shelves of ingredients specifically for nabe. Like pera-pera udon.

Noodles that are flat and broad, and when you put them in the pot...

G: They go like rice cakes.

E: That's right.

G: You can get nabe for silicone steamers now too.

JQR: So you just put in the ingredients and stock, stick it in the microwave and it's done?

G: Easy as that.

E: Both convenience stores and supermarkets offer a comprehensive lineup of "nabe" sets, so if you live alone and come home late at night, instead of buying a ready-made lunchbox type meal you can prepare a hotpot. Even nabe eaten alone will warm you up more than a lunchbox. Accompanied by your favorite tippie, it makes the perfect meal.

JQR: On the basis of that description I'm not sure if you'd call it an indulgence, or a bit lonely.

G: Ha, true, true, but it's the best choice healthwise I'd say.

E: Far healthier at nighttime than a calorie-filled bento meal.

A little extra effort with ingredients adds a new dimension

JQR: So what's the future of nabe cooking?

G: Even greater variety I'd say.

E: A greater tendency to draw the flavor of ingredients out thoroughly before adding to the pot, rather than using everything raw.

G: Nabe cooking is actually quite tricky. If you get the timing wrong certain ingredients will be boiled to a pulp, for

example.

E: (Picking up the tan-tan noodle mix) The same goes for this. Although it is ostensibly "nabe mix", if you make a little extra effort when preparing niku-miso (ground meat in miso paste) to leave some over for nabe, it will just lift the flavor that little bit higher. Maybe add lightly-grilled chicken, that sort of thing – you'll find the taste improves immensely.

G: More and more ideas like that are sure to emerge from now on. But this year, start by expanding your options with dipping sauces and stocks.

E: That's right, it's all about learning how much fun it is to find flavors you personally enjoy.

G: The possibilities are endless when it comes to Japanese seasonings, and you're sure to encounter some totally new flavors.

E: So you can gather round and enjoy dining together, but all have different dipping sauces on your plates, that sort of thing.

JQR: Kind of a "nabe masquerade" if you like.

G and E: "Nabe masquerade"?

JQR: Well, everyone's eating together and remarking on how delicious it is, but in fact are all enjoying different flavors.

G: Different flavors? Now that does strike me as a bit sad (laughs).

E: Ha, maybe. But eating your own preferred food, with your own preferred flavoring, your own preferred degree of saltiness, and because it's at home, imbibing your own preferred drink: if that's a "nabe masquerade" it sounds pretty good to me.

“Find the flavors you really like!”

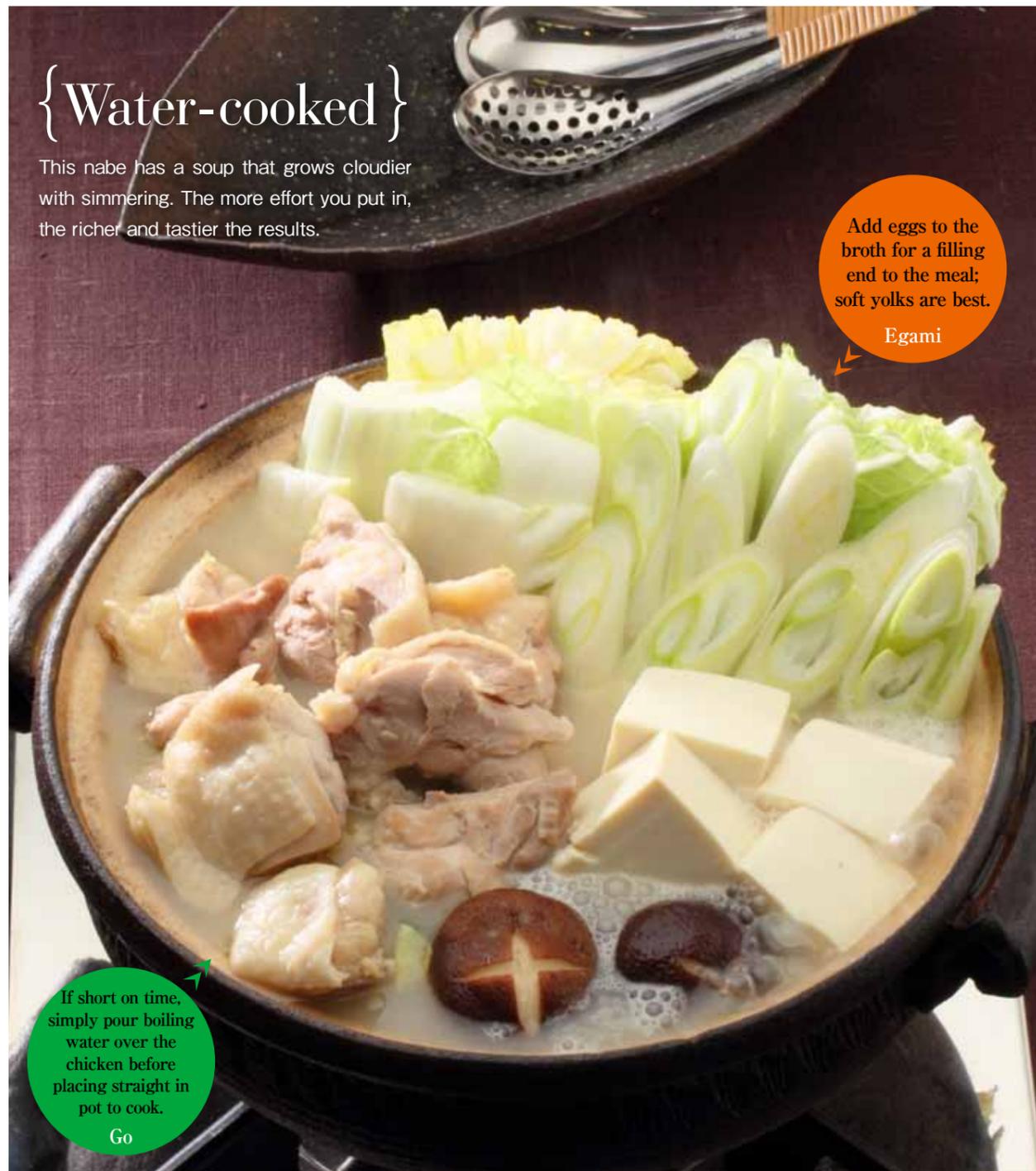


Chieko Go

Food advisor. A foodie since childhood, and fan of all cuisines from Western to Japanese to Chinese. Studied confectionery-making. Worked under Kihachi Kumagai, and since striking out on her own has forged a career in menu design, product development etc.

Making classic nabe dishes

Seafood, meat, or a combination of both? Here are recipes for three of the numerous classic nabe variations, including the yosenabe shown at the beginning of the feature. Whether or not you add any extra touches is up to you: nabe is one of the most adaptable ways of cooking there is.



{ Water-cooked }

This nabe has a soup that grows cloudier with simmering. The more effort you put in, the richer and tastier the results.

Add eggs to the broth for a filling end to the meal: soft yolks are best.

Egami

If short on time, simply pour boiling water over the chicken before placing straight in pot to cook.

Go



Ingredients

Chicken, Chinese cabbage, Leeks, Shiitake mushrooms, Tofu, Ponzu Sauce, *Quantities to taste

Method

- ① Boil water in a deep pan, add chicken pieces (bone in) and cook.
- ② Simmer until cloudy, then strain soup and cool. If short on time, you can start from step 3.
- ③ Place soup and chicken in ceramic casserole, add vegetables, tofu, etc., as desired.
- ④ Use ponzu for dipping, and season to preference.
- ⑤ Finish by making zosui (add cooked rice).



{ Miso chanko-nabe }

Chanko-nabe, served to sumo wrestlers, is filling and packed with goodness.

Add yamaimo paste (tororo) and eat with other ingredients for a milder dish.

Go

Add a knob of butter at the end of cooking for an extra rich texture and flavor.

Egami



Ingredients

Fish (sardine) or meat balls, Chicken thighs, boned pork rib etc. Chinese cabbage, Leeks, Mushrooms, Carrots, Stock, Miso, Sake, *Quantities to taste

Method

- ① Make the fish or meat balls. Store-bought meatballs also work well.
- ② Place miso, stock and sake in pot and heat. The flavor should be intense.
- ③ Add meat, cabbage and other vegetables, then fish balls or meat dumplings.
- ④ Finish by making rice broth or udon.

Using nabe mix

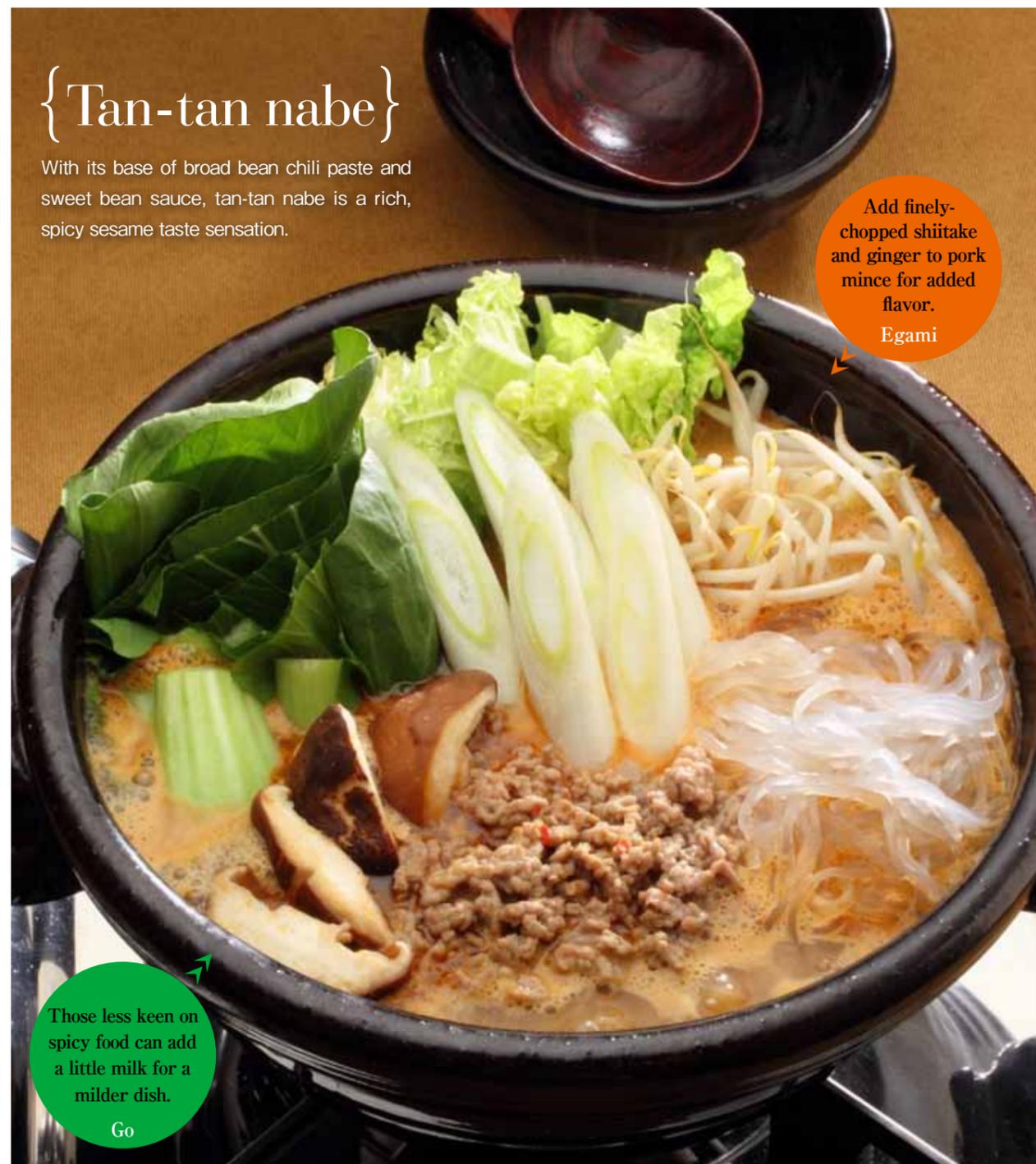
Packet nabe mixes are another option if you're in a hurry, and these days there are plenty of choices. Use the mix on its own for a quick and easy meal, or add some extra touches for even tastier results.

{ Tan-tan nabe }

With its base of broad bean chili paste and sweet bean sauce, tan-tan nabe is a rich, spicy sesame taste sensation.

Add finely-chopped shiitake and ginger to pork mince for added flavor.
Egami

Those less keen on spicy food can add a little milk for a milder dish.
Go

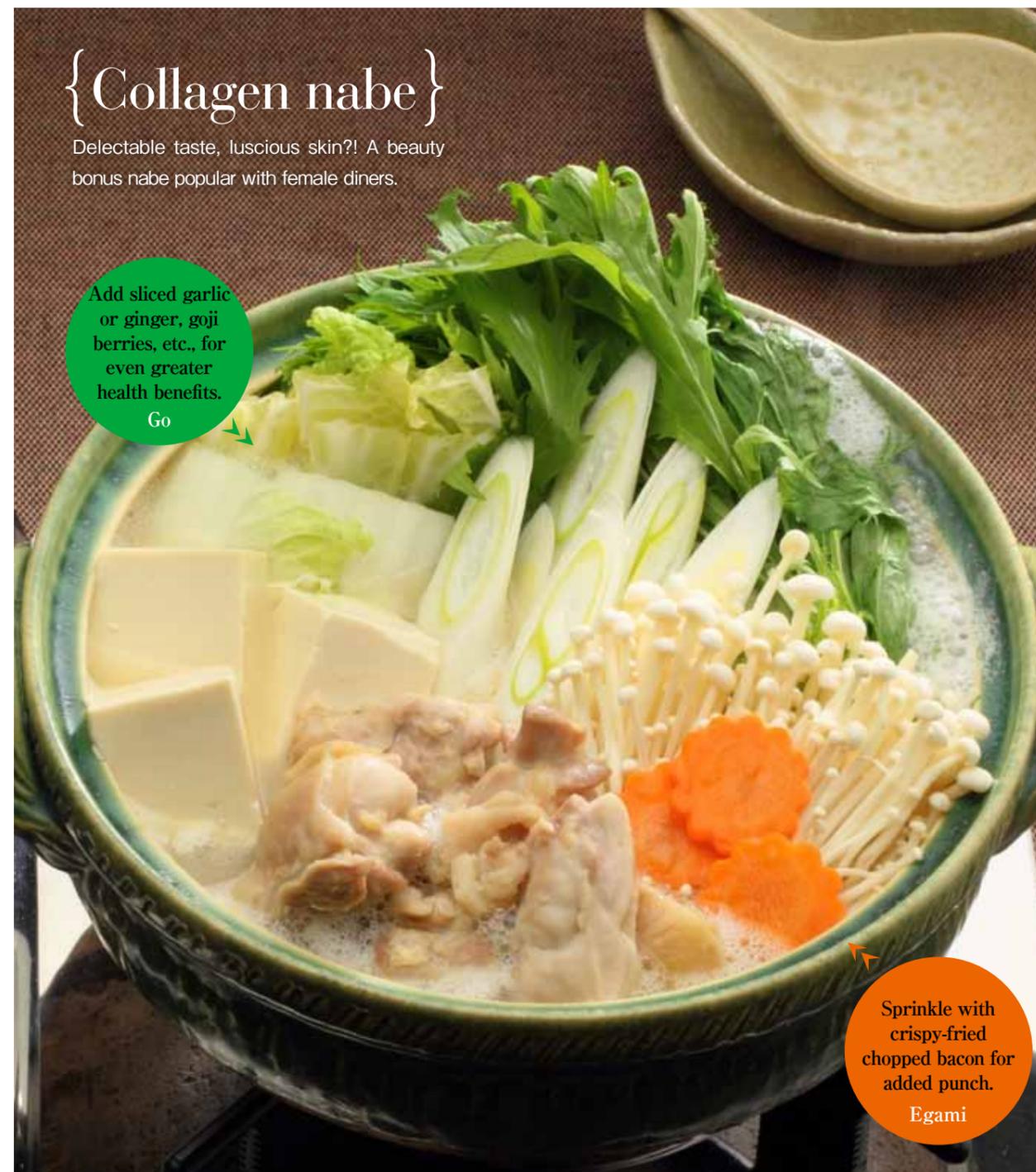


{ Collagen nabe }

Delectable taste, luscious skin?! A beauty bonus nabe popular with female diners.

Add sliced garlic or ginger, goji berries, etc., for even greater health benefits.
Go

Sprinkle with crispy-fried chopped bacon for added punch.
Egami



Ingredients

Minced pork, Chinese cabbage, Pak choi (Bak choy), Leeks, Shiitake, Harusame (Bean thread noodles), Tan-tan nabe soup mix
*Quantities to taste

Method

- ① Stir-fry minced pork using sesame oil in a frypan.
- ② Cut up other ingredients as required.
- ③ Place tan-tan nabe soup mix in pot, bring just to boil and add pork.
- ④ Next add vegetables, etc., and when heated through, add harusame.
- ⑤ Add Chinese noodles to finish for tan-tan noodles.

Using this !



Ingredients

Chicken thighs, Chinese cabbage, Leeks, Mizuna, Enoki mushrooms, Tofu, Collagen nabe mix
*Quantities to taste

Method

- ① Cut chicken into bite-size pieces. Cut up vegetables.
- ② Place collagen nabe mix in pot and heat.
- ③ Add all ingredients except mizuna and simmer.
- ④ When cooked, add mizuna to finish.

Using this !



Taking nabe flavor to another level

Just a little extra effort makes delicious “shikomi-nabe”

A nabe hotpot makes for a fun, sociable meal, but if flavor is top priority, a little extra effort makes all the difference. Here Chieko Go shares her recipes for “shikomi-nabe”: richly-flavored hotpot dishes prepared in advance. Try them for a taste experience, a cut above the average nabe.

Chieko Go's recipes show how

“Draw it out and seal it in” for maximum flavor!



The usual nabe cooking method is to place the ingredients in a simmering pot there and then for prompt consumption. The nabe dishes detailed here, however, require extra preparation beforehand, or shikomi. The idea is to optimize the flavor of the ingredients through a few advance preparations.

Nabe cooking may look easy, but it is actually quite tricky to get the timing right for eating. I'm sure most of us have had the experience of serving food out of the pot onto our plate only to have it fall apart or dry out. The moment meat is thrown into a bubbling pot, it shrivels and starts to toughen. If forgotten for a while, it turns chewy. Conversation may be flowing around the pot, but one still needs to keep a serious eye on the food. Being something of a glutton myself, along with the chatter I like to be able to tuck in without worrying about the state of the food (laughs). You'll find two of my suggested shikomi-nabe recipes on the right. I'll leave you to follow the steps. Just let me mention a few important things to remember first. The most important thing is the pot, the “nabe” itself. Lately I've become quite a fan of the French stove-top pan. These

are very heavy, with a flat lid covered in bumps on the inside. Rising steam hits the bumps and falls like rain, promoting the circulation of moisture. The heavy lid forms an excellent seal, stopping steam from escaping. Meat braised using this type of pan results in a tender, richly flavored and nourishing meal. And because heat circulates efficiently, the vegetables bubble away at a low temperature, for perfectly-cooked, intensely flavorful results. No stock is used. The next point is to use the flavor that comes from the meat and vegetables, while making sure the meat retains its juiciness. This flavor is the product of salt and oil. Drawing out the flavor with salt and adding oil boosts its intensity.

Everyone sits around the pan to dine on the finished product, but if left simmering too long, as you might expect, some ingredients will lose their flavor. The trick is to turn off the heat at a suitable time, then back on again to make the rice or noodle broth or risotto to finish. Shikomi-nabe cooking draws out the flavor of the ingredients to maximum advantage, and is well worth a try.

POINT

- ① Use a pot with a heavy lid.
- ② Make the flavor of the ingredients the stock.
- ③ Use salt and oil for seasoning.

Chinese cabbage and chicken hotpot with onion sauce

Ingredients

(Sauce)	(Pot)
(A) Onion (finely chopped) --- 40 g	Boneless chicken thigh (cut into bite-size pieces) --- 1
Leeks (finely chopped) --- 30 g	Chinese cabbage (roughly-chopped) --- 1/4 clump
Ginger (grated) --- 15 g	Tanba-shimeji (small field mushrooms) --- 1/2 clump
Garlic (finely chopped) --- 5 g	Water --- A required
(B) Sesame oil --- 50 g	Sesame oil --- 2T
White sesame oil --- 30 g	Salt --- pinch
(C) Soy sauce --- 1/3 tsp	Black pepper --- pinch
Fish sauce (nam pla) --- 1.5 T	
Salt --- 2 g	
White sesame paste --- 10 g	

Method

- ① Make the sauce. Place (A) in a heatproof bowl. Heat (B) until smoking slightly, pour over (A), and add (C) to flavor.
- ② Cut chicken thigh into bite-size pieces, sprinkle generously with salt.
- ③ Fill pan to about halfway with roughly-chopped cabbage. Lay chicken on top, add remaining cabbage and shimeji.
- ④ Pour sesame oil over, fill pan with water to about 2/3 mark, and simmer covered for approximately 25 minutes.
- ⑤ Place pot on table and serve.
- ⑥ At the end, leaving a little of the meat and vegetables and the juices, add udon.



Salt pork and cabbage braised with tomato

Ingredients

(Salt pork)	(Pot)
Boned pork rib --- 300-350g	Cabbage (roughly-chopped) --- 1/2
Salt --- Scant 10g	Garlic (crushed) --- 1-2 cloves
(A)	Onion (roughly-chopped) --- 1
Mushrooms (roughly-chopped) --- 5	Mushrooms --- 2-3
Chickpeas --- 1 can	Olive oil --- 1 1/2 T
Canned tomatoes --- 1 can	Bay leaves --- 2
Salt, pepper --- To taste	Water --- 200cc
	Salt, pepper --- Small amounts to taste

Method

- ① Prepare salt pork beforehand. Rub salt into pork, wrap in cling film or similar, and refrigerate for 3-6 days.
- ② Place olive oil in pot, add roughly-chopped cabbage. Add onion and garlic, salt lightly, place lumps of pork on top without further cutting and sprinkle with pepper.
- ③ Add bay leaves and water, place lid on firmly and braise. Add water from time to time until vegetables release moisture to prevent sticking. Start at a medium to high heat, and once steam rises from the pan turn down and simmer for about 30 minutes.
- ④ Remove braised pork and cut into manageable slices.
- ⑤ Return to pot, add ingredients in (A), season with salt and pepper and simmer covered for 20-25 minutes.
- ⑥ Place pot on table to serve.
- ⑦ At the end, leaving a little of the meat and vegetables and the juices, add cooked rice to make risotto. Use any leftover for pasta sauce the next day.

