

Japanese Foods Near You

— Foods Used as Medicine (*Umeboshi*) —

The period from February to early March is referred to as “*soshun*,” a term which literally means “early spring.” The weather is still cold during this period and it is spring in name only, but plum trees in parks, yards, and myriad other locations begin to flower and scent the air with a fragrance that announces the imminent coming of spring. After the flowers come the fruit. When they ripen around June, they are used to make pickled plums, or *umeboshi*, in many households.

Making *umeboshi* is an age-old tradition in Japan. The oldest batch of *umeboshi* in existence today was pickled in 1576, and is still preserved in good condition. It is said that *umeboshi* that have been made according to the traditional method and stored in a suitable environment will not spoil, and will remain edible even for a hundred years.

Umeboshi offer diverse benefits. The sour taste of the citric acid used to pickle the plums simulates the secretion of saliva and helps digestion and absorption. If eaten every day, they can prevent constipation. When you have a small appetite due to fatigue or stress, adding a single *umeboshi* to a meal will stimulate your appetite. *Okayu* (Japanese congee) with *umeboshi* is typically eaten during convalescence, because *umeboshi* have medical effects that help relieve fatigue.

In addition to the above, if you are concerned about your breath, eating *umeboshi* can help keep oral bacteria under control and prevent bad breath. *Umeboshi* can also prevent food poisoning and infectious diseases by killing harmful bacteria in the stomach.

In olden days, putting chopped *umeboshi* pulp on a strip of paper and wearing it on one’s temples was believed to be effective in lowering fevers and relieving headaches. Elderly women were often seen wearing such strips of paper, and were affectionately called “*umeboshi* grandmas.”

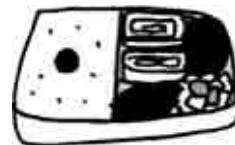
Because *umeboshi* offer many other benefits and keep for a long time, they have been an indispensable item in Japanese households since ancient times, as folk remedy and as nonperishable food.

An elderly lady I know always tells me that her secret to staying healthy is to eat an *umeboshi* every day.

身近にある日本の食物

— 薬などとして利用される食物（梅干し） —

2月から3月初めの頃を早春といって春の名を付けて呼びます。名のみ春でまだまだ寒いのですが、公園や家の庭などあちこちに植えられている梅の木には花が咲き、いい香りを漂わせて、春が近くまでやって来ていることを知らせてくれます。梅の木は花が散ると実がなり、6月頃にはその熟した果実で多くの家庭では梅干しを作ります。



日本では古くから梅干しは作られており、現存の最古のものは1576年につけ込まれたもので、良好な状態で保存されています。伝統的製法によって作られた梅干しは、保管に適した環境では腐らずに、100年前に作られたものでも食べられるそうです。

梅干しには、いろいろな効用があります。梅干しのクエン酸の酸味が唾液の分泌を促して消化吸収を助けたり、毎日食べる習慣があると便秘予防にも効果的です。疲労やストレスで食欲がないときにはメニューに梅干しを一つ加えるだけで食欲増進です。また、疲労回復などの薬効があるため、療養時にはおかゆと梅干しをよく食べます。

口臭が気になるときに一つ食べると口の中の雑菌を抑え口臭予防に、また、胃腸内の殺菌にも役立つので食中毒や伝染病の予防にもなります。

潰した梅干しを紙片に付けて、こめかみに貼ると解熱や頭痛に効くと言われて、昔はそんな姿の老婆をよく見かけ、「梅干婆さん」と親しみをこめて呼ばれていました。

梅干しにはほかにもいろいろな効用があり保存もきくため、民間薬や保存食として昔から日本の家庭にはなくてはならないものの一つです。

私の知り合いのおばあさんは、元気の秘訣は、毎日梅干しを一つ食べるからだ、いつも自慢して話してくれます。

