

Japanese Foods Near You

— Foods Used in Games —

Although the hot summer days have moved into September, here let us talk about watermelons, a must-have fruit during the summer.

When watermelons appear in stores, with their large, round shape capturing shoppers' attention, it is a sure sign that summer has arrived. Eaten chilled, they quench even the deepest thirsts. Although it is no easy task to make room for a watermelon in the refrigerator, that inconvenience is a trifling matter when the entire family comes together upon hearing their mother call, "Anybody for watermelon?" and takes pure pleasure in sinking their teeth into watermelon slices.

No trip to the beach with family and friends is complete without a watermelon. It does not matter that it is heavy. "Watermelon splitting" is one of the most popular games people play on the beach. A blindfolded person holding a large stick has to locate and split the watermelon by relying only on verbal directions given by the others. Whether the stick misses its mark or hits the bull's-eye, everyone can enjoy a good laugh. Naturally, they all share in eating the watermelon after it has finally been split open. This game of watermelon splitting is something of a summer tradition in Japan, and watermelons are the fruit of choice to survive the hot summer.

Next, let us shift our attention to red (*azuki*) beans and rice, which are precious and relatively expensive even today.

Red beans and rice are used to make beanbags for playing the juggling game of *otedama*. Games similar to *otedama* are seen throughout the world, but uniquely in Japan, it became popular particularly among young girls. With today's increasing trend toward nuclear families, however, the tradition of making and playing *otedama* has ceased to be passed down from mother to daughter and from daughter to granddaughter, and the traditional Japanese children's game is quickly becoming forgotten.

Granted, there were few toys in ancient times, but *otedama* beanbags were made for children using red beans and rice even though they were precious and expensive food commodities, probably because people in ancient times knew that *otedama* is a good game for children's development.

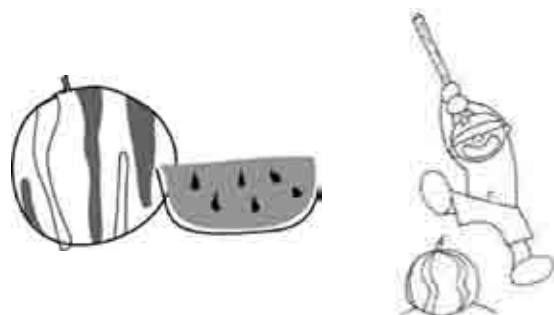
身近にある日本の食物

— 遊びに使われる食物 —

9月になりましたが、夏になくなくてはならないスイカについてお話しします。

スイカが店先に並ぶと、その丸くてひととき大きな形は、すぐ見つけることができ、夏がきたと心が躍ります。冷やして食べると乾いたのども潤います。冷蔵庫の中を整理して入れ込むのも大変ですが、「さーあ！スイカを切りますよ！」の母親のつぶ声から始まって、家族揃ってスイカにかぶりつくうれしさはたまりません。

家族や会社の仲間などと海水浴場に行くときにはスイカは欠かせません。重くても提げていきます。砂浜でのレクリエーションの代表格は「スイカ割り」です。目隠した人が棒をもって、周囲の声だけを頼りにスイカを割る遊びです。割ろうとして振り下ろした棒が空振りにおわっても、うまく割れても、砂浜は笑い声であふれます。もちろん割れたスイカはみんなで分け合って食べます。「スイカ割り」は日本の夏の風物詩です。スイカは暑い夏と一緒に乗り切る人気者です。



次に、現在でも貴重で高価な小豆やお米についてお話しします。

小豆やお米は、お手玉遊びに使う「お手玉」を作るのに使います。世界にもお手玉遊びはありますが、日本では特に女の子の遊び（おもちゃ）として定着してきました。昨今の核家族化進行とともに、母から娘、孫へと作り方や遊び方が伝承されなくなり、日本の子供たちの遊びとして、忘れ去られていっています。

昔はおもちゃが少なかったとはいえ、お手玉遊びが子供の成長にとってよい遊びであるということを知っていたからこそ、食物として貴重で高価な小豆やお米を使ってまで「お手玉」を作り、子供に与えたのでしょう。

