

Japanese Foods Near You

— Foods that Are Associated with Good Fortune —

Osechi ryori, or the traditional cuisine that the Japanese eat on New Year's Day, is a delectable assortment of foods associated with good fortune.

As New Year's Day (January 1) marks the beginning of the year, the Japanese people perform various rituals to welcome the Toshigami, the god of the New Year, and to pray anew for good harvest and the safety of their family. Since they believe that the Toshigami dwells in their household during the first three days of the New Year, they customarily refrain from cooking (using the kitchen knife) during that period. Instead, at the end of the year they prepare *osechi ryori*, bountiful quantities of preserved foods artfully arranged in stacked boxes called *jubako*, which the whole family shares over those first three days.

Most of the ingredients and dishes of the *osechi ryori* have long shelf life, and are associated with good fortune. Here are some examples:

- **Ebi** (shrimp)
With its rounded spine, the shrimp is symbolic of long life, and embodies the wish to live until one's posture becomes stooped.
- **Tai** (sea bream)
The sea bream is associated with good fortune in Japan because it is red, a color that is considered auspicious, and also because its Japanese name "*tai*" phonetically forms the last syllable of the word for "auspicious:" "*omedeTAI*." It is an indispensable ingredient on celebratory occasions.
- **Kazunoko** (herring roe)
Served either dried or salted, *kazunoko* is eaten in hopes that, like the herring whose ovaries contain thousands of eggs, the family will be blessed with many children and continue to prosper for many generations.
- **Kuromame** (stewed black soy beans)
The term "*kuromame*" is a play on the word "*mame*," which refers to "beans," but it is also a homonym of a word meaning "diligent" or "hard-working." Thus, *kuromame* stands for people's wish to be able to work diligently in good health.
- **Kinton** (mashed sweet potato with chestnut)
Because the kanji characters for "*kinton*" means "richness," eating *kinton* is symbolic of bringing monetary luck and affluent living.
- **Kobumaki** (kelp rolls)
Kobumaki is considered an auspicious dish, because the "*kobu*" in "*kobumaki*" phonetically makes up the last syllables of the word "*yorokobu*," meaning "joy."
- **Renkon** (lotus root)
The many holes in the lotus root are associated with having a clear vision into the future.

There are many more ingredients and dishes that have specific meaning, or have meanings that differ according to region.

In the past, it was the mother's job in each household to prepare *osechi ryori* at the end of the year. It was a time-consuming task to say the least, especially during one of the busiest times of the year. In recent years, however, *osechi ryori* can be purchased at department stores. Some come ready packed in a *jubako*, while others allow consumers to select their favorites in the quantities they desire and arrange them in the *jubako* themselves. *Osechi ryori* seems to be not only becoming more convenient, but more flexible and accommodating as well.

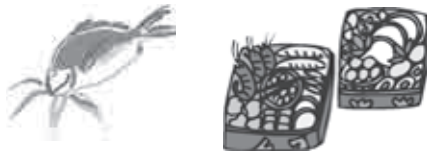
身近にある日本の食物

— 縁起を担ぐ食物 —

お正月に食べる「おせち料理」のなかから、縁起を担ぐ食物を紹介しします。

元日（一月一日）は一年の節目にあたり、日本では、歳神（としがみ）様をお迎えし、新しい年の豊作と家内安全を祈る行事が行われます。三が日の間は神様がいらっしゃるために炊事をしない風習があったため、暮れに「おせち料理」を沢山作って重箱に詰めておき、正月の間、家族みんなで食べました。

「おせち料理」は、縁起がよく、日もちの食材・料理が献立の基本となります。そのいくつかを紹介しします。



- **海老**
腰が曲がっている姿から、腰が曲がるまで長生きするようにという長寿の願いがあります。
 - **鯛**
日本では赤い色がめでたい色とされており、また「タイ」が「めでたい」に通じることから縁起のよい魚とされており、慶事には欠かせません。
 - **数の子**
ニシンの卵を乾燥させたり、塩漬けにしたもので、子がたくさん生まれて、代々栄えますようにという願いがあります。
 - **黒豆**
「黒くまめめしく」という語呂合わせで、元気でまめに働けますようにという意味があります。
 - **きんとん**
「金団」と書き、財宝という意味があります。金運を招いたり豊かな生活が送れますようにとの願いがあります。
 - **昆布巻**
「よろこぶ」という語呂合わせで、おめでたい食材とされています。
 - **れんこん**
穴があいているので、将来を見通せるようにとの願いがあります。
まだまだ、食材・料理は沢山ありますし、地方によって違いもあります。
- 昔は、どこの家庭でも暮れに、おせち料理を作るのは、母親の仕事で大忙しでした。最近では、デパートなどで、重箱に詰めたものが売られていたり、好きな料理を好きな量だけ買ってきて、自分で重箱に詰めたりできるなど、とても便利になってきています。