

# DEEPLY REGIONAL JAPAN®

## ‘TSUBU-AN’: SWEET ADZUKI BEAN PASTE (COARSE)

1 June 2019; UPDATED: 18 July 2020



Adzuki beans are one of the most important food crops in the traditional Japanese cuisine. It originated in continental Asia but have been cultivated in Japan since prehistoric times. Hundreds, if not thousands, of savoury and sweet recipes use these beans, which have been counted alongside rice, barley, buckwheat and millet as one of the staple ‘grains’ of the Japanese.

Sweet adzuki bean paste is used in a wide range of Japanese sweets. It is used as a topping or sauce in desserts, e.g. anmitsu, as a filling in dumpling-type sweets such as mochi (sticky rice cake), daifuku, manjū and an-man, and as a base ingredient in yōkan and kintsuba. It also pairs surprisingly well with Western-style desserts such as ice-creams, parfait, fruit salads and some types of cakes. It can even be used in savoury dishes that call for a hint of sweetness. Many varieties of adzuki bean paste exist, in terms of texture, colour and taste, and many famous confectioners pride themselves on the quality of their adzuki bean paste. In fact, to make adzuki bean paste well, considerable skill and experience are required.

Here, a simplified recipe for a popular type of coarse-grained paste, called ‘tsubu-an’, is presented. Strictly speaking, tsubu-an should keep most of the adzuki beans intact, however, this simplified recipe will result in many of the beans turning into a paste. If you prefer a completely smooth paste, see the recipe for ‘koshi-an’.

## INGREDIENTS

- Adzuki beans, dry 1 cup (dry)
- Sugar  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup or to taste
- Salt c. 1 level teaspoon in total
- Water As required

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Wash the beans well to remove dirt and other residues. Soak in plenty of cold water for at least 6 hours or until the beans have fully absorbed moisture. Do not oversoak, however, as the beans may start to break apart.
2. Drain the rehydrated adzuki beans and rinse under running water. Place in saucepan, add about half a level teaspoon of salt and just cover with water. Bring to the boil on medium heat. Skim off and discard the froth that floats to the surface. Repeat this several times until very little further frothing occurs, then tip out most of the water carefully.



3. Refill the saucepan with warm water so that the adzuki beans are just covered, and add another half a teaspoon of salt. Bring again to the boil over medium heat, then drop the heat to low and gently boil or simmer. Stir gently from time to time for even cooking. With soaking and pre-boiling, the beans will not take very long to cook, so monitor regularly.
4. Remove from the heat once the beans are fully cooked—i.e. soft with no hard core remaining, but not falling apart. Drain off any excess liquid using a sieve or colander.



5. Place the drained beans back in the saucepan. Add the sugar and sufficient water to just cover the cooked beans. Simmer covered with a lid on low–medium heat, stirring frequently to prevent burning (which can happen easily), and to work the liquid that has separated back into the paste. Cook until many (but not all) of the beans are falling apart and turning into a paste. The consistency should be similar to that of miso paste—not runny, but not dry or floury. If all the water gets absorbed by the beans before this stage, add more water. If there is too much liquid at the end of the cooking process, carefully tip out the excess liquid (you can enjoy this as a thick sweet drink that is full of health-benefiting polyphenols from the beans). Note that the paste will become noticeably drier and stiffer when cool, so do not discard too much liquid.
6. Remove from the heat and allow to cool to room temperature. Use in your sweets and desserts.
7. If not using right away, store your paste in a sealed container in the refrigerator. The paste should keep for about a week if properly stored. If the paste dries out or hardens during storage, place in a saucepan with a little water and stir over low heat to refresh the paste. The paste will also freeze well for a short period (generally up to about two weeks), but avoid longer storage as the moisture will separate out of the paste.