

DEEPLY REGIONAL JAPAN®

‘ANPURA-MOCHI’: NORTHERN JAPANESE STICKY POTATO CAKE (WHEAT-FREE RECIPE)

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Anpura-mochi topped with gomamiso-daré (sesame miso sauce; see separate recipe), shichimi (Japanese seven spice chilli powder) and ground sanshō (Japanese pepper)

The word ‘mochi’ is most often associated with sweet or savoury rice cakes that are made from steamed glutinous (mochi) rice. However, many Japanese regional recipes named ‘mochi’ are actually made from a mixture of rice and other starches, or do not contain any rice at all. The most common non-rice starches used in mochi include those derived from wheat, sweet potatoes, potatoes, buckwheat and millet. Mochi recipes using potatoes (‘jagaimo’ in Japanese, sometimes simply ‘imo’) are found mainly in northern Japan—where potatoes are widely grown during the short growing season.

Here, I present a recipe based on the Akita-style ‘anpura-mochi’. The standard recipe uses only potatoes and potato starch, although some recipes add a little cooked rice or rice flour. The result is a surprisingly moist and sticky ‘mochi’ that is quite different from the various types of potato cakes found in Western cuisines. The potatoes are either finely grated raw or boiled then mashed, before being fashioned into cakes and cooked. Anpura-mochi can be baked, fried or boiled—it is classically served as a component of a stew dish called ‘anpura-jiru’ (see separate recipe). The word ‘anpura’ in the Akita dialect means ‘potatoes’. The origin of the word can be traced to the Dutch word for potatoes ‘aardappel’, and reflects the influence of maritime trade during the Edo-period (17th to 19th centuries), when many coastal towns in Akita area were busy ports.

In my recipe, I include tapioca starch—not a traditional ingredient in Japanese cooking, but widely available in Australia—to help better bind the mochi and for extra ‘stickiness’. If baking on a hotplate or in a frying pan, I recommend using butter or coconut oil for greasing, as they appear to reduce the risk of sticking which can be an issue with some potato varieties. You can also steam, pan-fry or boil your mochi.

If enjoying as a stand-alone item, anpura-mochi goes particularly well with sweet–salty miso-based pastes, such as the negi-miso (spring onion miso) and goma-miso (sesame miso; please enquire for recipes for these). Other sauces such as soy sauce, vinegared soy sauce, ‘tonkatsu’, sweet chilli and Worcestershire are also suitable.

INGREDIENTS (for approximately 8 pieces, serving 3 to 4 persons)

- Potato (any variety suitable for mashing or baking) 600–800 g
- Potato starch c. ½ cup (adjust depending on the texture of potatoes)
- Tapioca starch c. ½ cup (adjust depending on the texture of potatoes)
- Water c. ½ cup or as required
- Butter or coconut oil (if baking or pan-frying your mochi) For greasing the hotplate or pan

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Wash and peel the potatoes. Cut into pieces c. 5 cm across. Place in a saucepan and cover with water. Bring to the boil on medium heat, covered with a lid.



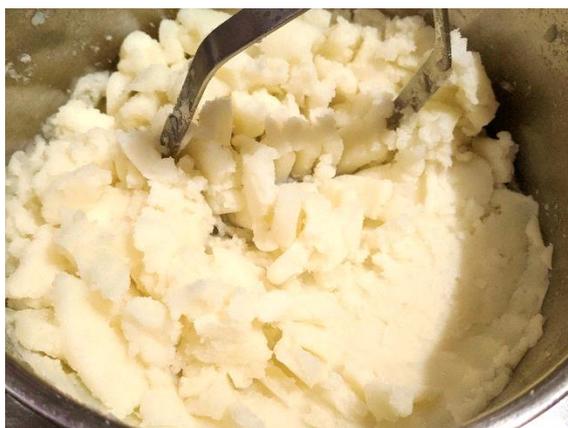
2. Once the potatoes are cooked through (test with a thin bamboo skewer or similar; it should go through without resistance) but still firm (not falling apart), remove from the heat and tip out the boiling water. Refill the saucepan with fresh water to cover the potatoes, then tip out the water to rinse away any remaining froth.



3. Refill the saucepan with a little water, such that it stands c. 1 cm at the base of the saucepan. Place back on medium heat and bring back to the boil. Stir continually to prevent burning. Once all the liquid has evaporated and the potato pieces are starting to fall apart, remove from the heat and allow to cool for handling.



4. Mash the boiled potatoes while warm to a smooth paste. Transfer to a large bowl, combine with the potato and tapioca starches, and mix thoroughly.



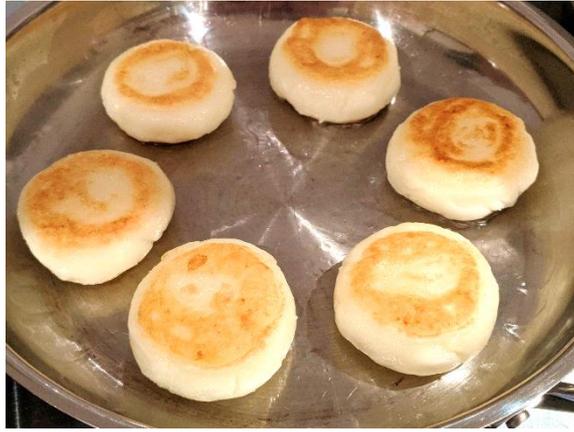
5. Add water in increments, mixing continually, to form a smooth dough. The consistency should be quite soft (softer than a normal bread dough), but NOT wet and sticky—the dough should be solid enough to hold together and not stick to your hands when handled. [You may need to adjust the amount of water depending on the type of potato used. Take particular care not to add too much water. If the dough has become too wet, adjust with additional potato starch.]



6. Divide the dough into 8 equal parts and roll into rough balls 4 to 5 cm across. Then, flatten each ball gently to form a disc 2 to 3 cm thick. Ensure that the top and bottom of the discs are as flat as possible for even baking.



7. If you are baking your mochi, grease a wide, shallow pan or hotplate liberally with butter or coconut oil; ensure that you use enough butter or oil otherwise the mochi will burn on. [If you are pan-frying, simply use more butter or oil and a pan.] Place on medium heat. When the oil has heated (test with a tiny piece of the mochi dough, which should bubble or gently sizzle), place the mochi in the pan and gently press down with a spatula to ensure that the base of each mochi is sitting flat on the pan. Once the mochi is sizzling steadily, lower the heat to low–medium and slowly bake for a few minutes without disturbing.
8. After a few minutes, monitor progress by using a spatula to gently lift the base of the mochi. Turn each mochi over when the base is starting to become crisp and light brown. [If the mochi is stuck firmly to the pan, do NOT force it to lift off the pan, as it generally will loosen once the base is sufficiently cooked.] Turn over a few times to ensure even cooking, until both sides are golden brown and crisp.



9. When the mochi is cooked, remove from the heat, and drain off excess oil on a piece of paper towel.
10. Serve while warm. Top with a miso-based flavouring paste or sauce (please enquire with us for recipes) or a sauce of your choice before serving, plus any garnish such as finely chopped shallot, spring onion or parsley leaves, dried chilli flakes or shichimi (Japanese seven-spice chilli powder), ground or cracked black pepper, or toasted sesame seeds.
11. If not enjoying straight away, store your mochi in a sealed container in a cool spot out of direct sunlight—it will keep for a day. To refresh a mochi that has gone cold and stiff, reheat slowly in a frying pan over low heat for a few minutes just before serving, taking care not to burn the mochi.