

DEEPLY REGIONAL JAPAN®

SQUID ‘IKA-YAKI’: STREET-STYLE GRILLED SQUID

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Ika-yaki topped with shichimi (Japanese seven-spice chilli powder)

‘Ika-yaki’ (alternatively called ‘Yaki-ika’) is one of many classic Japanese street foods. Often offered at street stalls and in izakaya-type restaurants, it is a simple dish of whole grilled squid basted in sweetened soy sauce. The sweet, umami-laden aroma of ika-yaki being grilled is unmistakable and irresistible to many—it often pervades the atmosphere at festivals and markets in Japan.

Traditionally, ika-yaki is grilled on a hotplate, grill or mesh. Here, a recipe using a shallow pan is described, which actually results in a more tender texture. As a simple dish, the freshness of the squid and cooking technique can ‘make or break’ the ika-yaki. Contrary to many squid dishes, cooking must be carried out over medium or low–medium heat, but must not be longer than absolutely necessary. Scoring the squid tube before grilling is important not only to accommodate shrinkage during cooking, but also for the aesthetics. The seasoning mix can be varied according to your taste, however, the use of sake and mirin (or their substitutes) is mandatory for texture and flavour.

For such a simple recipe, the humble ika-yaki really hits the spot, whether as a snack to accompany your favourite drink, dish in a meal menu, or a barbecue item.

INGREDIENTS

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| • Raw squid (calamari) tube, cleaned | 1 medium to large-sized |
| • Japanese soy sauce or tamari | 1 to 1½ level tablespoon or to taste |
| • Japanese sake (can substitute with vodka, or semi-sweet white wine) | 1 to 1½ level tablespoon |
| • Mirin (can substitute with sweet white wine, sweet sherry, or sweet apple cider) | ½ to 1 level tablespoon |
| • Ginger root, minced or very finely chopped | ½ to 1 level tablespoon |
| • OPTIONAL: Sugar | 1 level teaspoon or to taste |
| • OPTIONAL: Garlic, minced or very finely chopped | ½ level teaspoon or to taste |
| • Oil for greasing the pan | As required |
| • TOPPING: Shichimi (Japanese seven spice chilli powder), chopped shallot or parsley leaves, ground sanshō (Japanese pepper), ground pepper, toasted sesame seeds etc | As required |

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Wash the squid tube briefly under cold running water. Remove any hard parts that are still attached.
2. Using a sharp knife (Japanese handcrafted ‘santoku’ knife would be ideal), score both sides of the squid tube crosswise, c. 1 cm apart. Take care not to cut through the tube.



3. In a sealable container, combine the soy sauce/tamari, sake (or substitute), mirin (or substitute), ginger, and the optional ingredients of sugar and/or garlic. Mix well, then marinate the scored squid tube in the mixture for at least 20 minutes (an hour would be ideal). Turn over the tube at least once during marinating so that flavour penetrates both sides evenly.



4. Take out the marinated squid tube out of the marinade and allow excess liquid to drain off. Set aside.
5. Grease liberally a shallow pan with a lid. Place over medium heat. Once the pan has fully heated, place the squid tube in the pan. When sizzling steadily, lower the heat to low–medium and cover with a lid.



6. Turn over to bake the other side when the squid tube is starting to shrink and the lower side is starting to become opaque and white (generally after 2 to 3 minutes). Note that the squid should not be fully cooked at this stage. Again, cover with the lid.



- Once both sides are cooked to a similar degree, remove the squid tube from the pan temporarily. Pour the marinade into the pan and reduce until starting to thicken into a sauce, then return the squid to the pan and cook both sides in the sauce to coat evenly.



- Remove from the heat once the squid is fully cooked through but still tender (generally after 1 to 2 minutes). Place on a plate and top decoratively with topping of your choice. Serve immediately (kitchen scissors may make it easier to share the squid at the table). You can also chop or slice the squid and use it as a topping for steamed rice or stir-fried noodles—delicious!

