

Local Recipe: Benkei



Benkei is a local dish that has been handed down in the Kaibama district (especially Kita-Kaibama) in Haramachi-ku, Minamisoma. In the olden days, it was useful as a preserved food for the New Year, and it was an important food served to the Jodo Shinshu lectures for holidays. Nowadays, it is popular as a seasonal dish to eat during the harvest season (late fall to winter), made up of daikon radish and dried taro stems. It is best eaten cold rather than fresh, and it cannot be reheated. The longer it is kept, the richer and more delicious the taste becomes.

※As a result of the damaged caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, most of the Kaibama area has been designated as a disaster risk area, and residence is restricted. Due to the collapse of the Kaibama area community and the impact of the of the nuclear accident, it is difficult to obtain ingredients and it is uncertain how benkei will be passed down in the future from now on.

Benkei's Roots

This dish was introduced by immigrants who settled in Kaibama from the Hokuriku region during the rural reconstruction policy of the Oshu Nakamura domain, which had been devastated by the Tenmei famine at the end of the Edo period. There are local dishes thought to have been the origin of benkei found in the Tonami region of Toyama Prefecture (Nanto City, Tonami City, etc.), one of the areas from these immigrants came.

Origin of the Name “Benkei”

Because the ingredients used are the same, the name “benkei” is thought to be derived from the Tonami regional dialect for the foods “benke = grated daikon radish” and “benkeoroshi = grated daikon radish with chili pepper” in Toyama Prefecture.

How to Make Benkei (One-Pot Recipe)

【Ingredients】



1 Daikon (大根・*Daikon*)

15.5g (5-6 stems) Taro Root (芋がら・*Imogara*)

1-2 Red Chili Peppers (赤唐辛子・*Aka-Togarashi*)

8 Tablespoons Vinegar (酢・*Su*)

6 Tablespoons Soy Sauce (醤油・*Shoyu*)

4 1/2 Tablespoons Sugar (砂糖・*Sato*)

2 Tablespoons Oil (油・*Abura*)

Various origins of “benkei” have been passed down locally, but there is a theory that the name comes from the “seven tools of Benkei (12th-century warrior monk)” because it uses seven ingredients.

【How to Make】

1. Peel and cut the daikon into slices that are 2-4mm thick.
2. Wash the taro stems in warm water, pat dry with paper towel, and then cut into 10-15mm pieces.
3. Put oil into your pot and heat up the daikon.
4. While stirring, add 1-2 tablespoons of vinegar. This is to prevent the daikon from becoming too soft.
5. Add in the taro stem pieces as well as the rest of the ingredients (including the rest of the vinegar).
6. Put the chili peppers in the pot separate from each other.
7. Turn heat down to a simmer for about 10 minutes, taste occasionally.
8. Turn off the heat and let the ingredients come to room temperature. Once cool, you may enjoy eating the benkei.

※Because the required ingredients for benkei are usually measured by eye, this recipe has estimated amounts. Feel free to add and adjust the amounts as you like!



Secrets to make your benkei more delicious!

- After you finish cooking your benkei, do not reheat it.
- It is best to use a lot of daikon because you will need the moisture inside it.
- It is best to use taro stems that have become red.
- It is important for the benkei to be firm! Be careful not to make it too soft!
- It is even more delicious with each passing day!
- Every household has their own version of benkei. Feel free to add and adjust ingredients as you like!