

A Little Side Dish

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(Editorial Board)

It would be a waste to come all the way to Yamagata and only see the films! You have to try Yamagata's "Nmai mono," meaning "delicious food" in Yamagata dialect, too! So here is a guide to Yamagata's gourmet treats!

Akebi —

Akebi is one of Yamagata's many autumn tastes. The main regions that produce Akebi are Murayama and Okitama, making Yamagata Prefecture the producer of most of Japan's 150 ton yield in recent years. When it ripens the skin splits and you can eat the fruit inside, but in Yamagata people primarily eat the peel instead of the fruit. (I, myself, have never eaten the fruit ever since I was born.) The skin is bittersweet, and we usually stuff it with minced meat and deep-fry it, or chop it up and fry it with miso. It's the perfect snack to have with Yamagata's spicy local brew.

Imoni (Potato stew) —

Needless to say, Imoni is the local cuisine for which Yamagata is best known. It is a tradition that when autumn starts families and friends gather together at the riverside for an "imoni party." Every year at the beginning of September along the Mami-gasaki riverbed in Yamagata City "Japan's

Biggest Imoni Festival" is held, and people enjoy Imoni in a massive six meter pot. All sorts of different flavors are used to complement Imoni depending on the region. For example, in Yamagata Prefecture's Murayama region a soy sauce soup base with beef is used, but in the Shonai region they use a miso soup base with pork. They say the festival started in the Edo period, and at the time, since they didn't eat much meat, they ate it with *bodana*, a dried cod fillet.

On October 13th (Sunday), at 12:00 P.M. the second "Imoni Party at the Dead Center of Town" will be held in front of Yamagata Yatai Village Hottonaru-Yokocho. 800 cups of Imoni will be provided free of charge. (Presented by: The Association for the Promotion of Nanokamachi First Avenue, and Nigiwai Club)

Dashi —

Dashi is a simple dish which consists of chopping up summer vegetables like eggplant, cucumber, *myoga* ginger, *daikon* radish, and *oba* leaf into small pieces, mixing gooey things like *natto konbu* or okra to taste, and then adding some soy sauce. We throw it on some rice or cold tofu. Dashi is one of the must have summer dishes for families in Yamagata.

Motte-no-hoka (Japanese for "Absolutely Unthinkable," this is an edible chrysanthemum) —

Yamagata Prefecture is Japan's biggest producer of edible chrysanthemum. Even amongst the many varieties of edible chry-

santhemum, the light purple *motte-no-hoka* (which is officially called "enmeiraku") stands out with a reputation for being the "Yokozuna of edible chrysanthemum" due to its pleasant, unique flavor. It is said its name comes from people saying, "It's absolutely unthinkable to eat chrysanthemum, the symbol on the emperor's crest!" or, "This is unthinkable delicious!" One of its characteristics is its crisp texture, thanks to the cylindrical valves in its petals. If you boil it up and add soy sauce, you can enjoy its faint fragrance and slightly bitter flavor. The secret to it is to drizzle a little bit of vinegar in when you boil it, and it will come out with a nice vivid color. It's also delicious as a vinegared dish or tempura.

During the film festival, on October 13th (Sunday), various events will be held in conjunction with the vehicle free promenade at Nanokamachi Odori, like "Mogami Yoshiaki's 400th Anniversary — Yoshiaki Festa, Rakuichi Rakuza," and "Machinaka Nigiwai Festival 2013." Events such as, "The Gourmet of the Land," "Product Market," and "The Battle of the Sengoku Period Warlord's Pots," are sure to leave an impression. You are certain to encounter all sorts of "nmai mono." Yamagata is a treasure house of foods. It is "motte-no-hoka" never to taste the "nmai mono" of Yamagata.

(Translated by Devin T. Recchio / Watanabe Kazutaka)

Meat-stuffed Akebi



あけびの肉詰め

Imoni



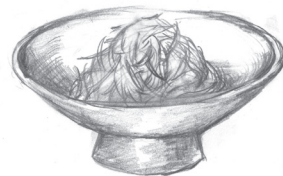
甘辛湯

Dashi



だし

Boiled Motte-no-hoka



モチノホカのおひたし