

Selections from NDL collections

## *Imo hyakuchin* : sweet potato dishes of the Edo Period

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This article is a translation of the article in Japanese in *NDL Monthly Bulletin No. 697 (May 2019)*.



*Imo Hyakuchin*. Edited by Chinkorou Shujin, by Hiranoya Hanemon and 3 others, 1789, 21cm.

Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#).

(Right) Title page

(Left) Sweet potato seller in the Ryukyu Kingdom

*Maruyaki* (○やき、○焼), *Hachirihan* (8.5 里), *Jusanri* (13 里). These words were often seen in shops selling sweet potatoes during the Edo period. *Maruyaki* means the potato is roasted in its skin. *Hachirihan* and *Jusanri* refer to the quality of the sweet potato. Chestnuts were considered a delicacy in old Edo, and the Japanese word for chestnut is *kuri*, which is a homonym with the phrase "nine Chinese miles (9 里)." *Hachirihan* literally means "eight-and-a-half Chinese miles," which is to say "not quite nine Chinese miles." In other words, "not quite as delicious as a chestnut." *Jusanri* literally means "thirteen Chinese miles," which is to say "farther than nine Chinese miles" or "even more delicious than a chestnut."

The sweet potato originated in Latin America and

eventually spread across the globe. It was introduced to the Ryukyu Kingdom<sup>1</sup> in 1605 and eventually came to western Japan. After Kyoho famine in 1732, Confucian and Dutch scholar Aoki Konyo (1698–1769) wrote and published in 1735 a book that recommended the cultivation of sweet potatoes, which can usually be harvested even when other crops have failed. Promoted by the Shogunate, the sweet potato spread across eastern Japan.

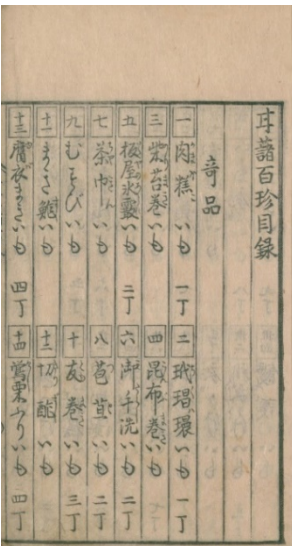
Although sweet potatoes are most commonly baked, the book *Imo hyakuchin* (100 Sweet Potato Dishes), which was published in 1789, presents 123 ways to cook them.

In fact, *Imo Hyakuchin* appears to be based on the book

<sup>1</sup> In 1429, Shō Hashi unified the Ryukyu Kingdom. He sent tribute to the Ming Emperor, and the Ryukyu Kingdom prospered by trading with both Japan and Southeast Asia. In 1609, Ryukyu was invaded and subjugated by the Satsuma clan. It was later incorporated into the Japan by the Meiji government, first as the Ryukyu Domain in 1872 and later as Okinawa Prefecture in 1879.

*Tofu Hyakuchin*<sup>2</sup>, which was published in 1782 and contains 100 different recipes for tofu, which are sorted into six categories: ordinary, advanced, delicious, unusual, superb, and exquisite. Once *Tofu haykuchin* became popular, versions dedicated to other foods were published one after another, including *Tai hyakuchin ryori himitsubako*<sup>3</sup> (100 Sea Bream Dishes), *Kaiman hyakuchin*<sup>4</sup> (100 Pike Conger Eel Dishes) and *Konnyaku hyakuchin*<sup>5</sup> (100 Konjac Dishes) were published.

Thus, *Imo hyakuchin* contains 123 recipes for sweet potatoes in four categories: Unusual, ordinary, superb, and exquisite. Many of these recipes call for grated raw sweet potato, which is almost never seen in modern cuisine.



### Unusual imo dishes

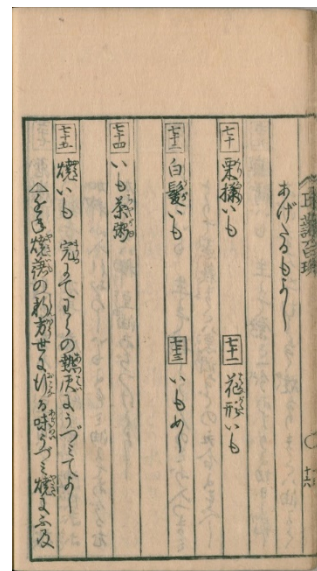
There are 63 recipes for unusual *imo* dishes, many of which are intended to give the appearance of other well-known foods. For example, *kujira-imo* is supposed to resemble whale skin with a subcutaneous layer of fat attached to it. And *tsurara-imo* is supposed to resemble icicles.

#### How to prepare *Kujira-imo*

Grate raw sweet potato and color it black with soot from the bottom of pots and pans. Line the bottom of a steaming box to a height of 6 mm. Next, grate raw sweet potato with no added color and add on top of the black sweet potato to a height of 3 cm. After steaming, cut the sweet potato into bite-sized pieces and deep-fry.

#### How to cook *Tsurara-imo*

Cut raw sweet potato into rectangular slices, coat with arrowroot flour, and boil.



This pages describes cooking methods for ordinary *imo* dishes. Recipes that were common at that time are not explained.

### Ordinary imo dishes

These 21 recipes, such as *hiryozu-imo*, *mushi-imo* and *yaki-imo*, are easy-to-prepare, and were eaten on a daily basis.

#### *Hiryozu-imo*

Grate raw sweet potato and add some tofu. Mix with ingredients like ginkgo nuts, wood-ear mushrooms, hemp seeds, or soybean sprouts and deep-fry.

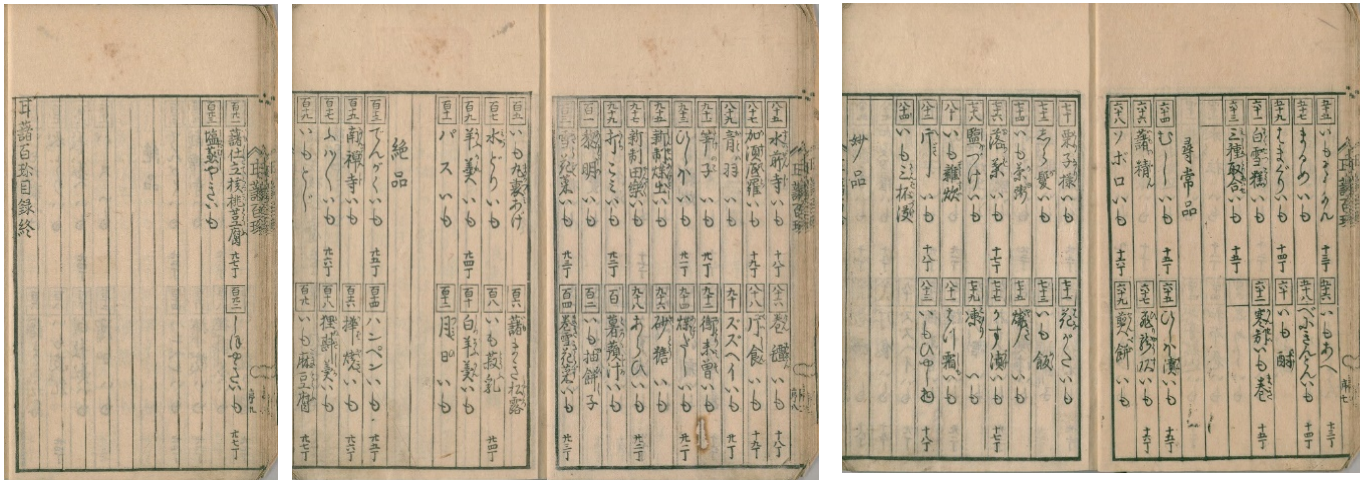
<sup>2</sup> *Tofu hyakuchin*. Written by Sodani Gakusen, published by Fujiya Zenshichi, 1782. Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#).

<sup>3</sup> *Tai hyakuchin ryori himitsubako*. Written by Kidodo shujin, published by Nishimura Ichiroemon and 5 others, 1785. 【NDL Call No. 121-103】

<sup>4</sup> *Kaiman hyakuchin* by Kajikawa Shichirobe and 3 others, 1795. 【NDL Call No. 182-149】

<sup>5</sup> *Konnyaku hyakuchin*. Written by Shinyakuchinjin in the late Edo era. Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#).





### Superb *imo* dishes

These 28 recipes include *kasutera-imo*, *tsukihi-imo*, and other recipes that have both an attractive presentation and delicious flavor.

#### *Kasutera-imo*

Add eggs and milk to grated raw sweet potato, then bake.

#### *Tsukihi-imo*

Peel a large, raw sweet potato, slice thinly, and add to boiling water. Remove and season with miso and sugar, then fold like a Japanese straw hat.

### Exquisite *imo* dishes

These 11 recipes are even better than the superb *imo* recipes and feature an exquisite blend of flavors such as *dengaku-imo*, *kabayaki-imo*, and fluffy sweet potato. The last two dishes are baked sweet potato with salt and steamed sweet potato with salt.

#### *Dengaku-imo*

Steam grated raw sweet potato and cut into rectangular shape. Skewer on bamboo sticks and coat with miso, then broil slightly.

#### *Kabayaki-imo*

Steam grated raw sweet potato in rectangular shape, and cover with seaweed. Dip in *sansho* (Japanese pepper) soy sauce and fry in a pan with sesame oil.

#### Fluffy sweet potato

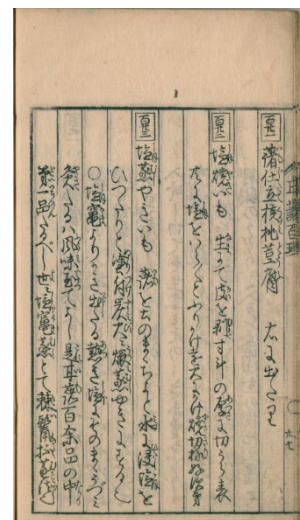
Grind raw sweet potato in a mortar, filter it, then mix with eggs. Ladle up the mixture and pour into the soup stock with soy sauce, add Japanese sake, then boil.

#### Roasted sweet potato with salt

Peel and cut sweet potato and sprinkle salt on them, then roast at some distance from the flame.

#### Baked sweet potato with salt

Soak sweet potato in water and coat with salt, then place in charcoal and bake.



These recipes for roasted sweet potato with salt and baked sweet potato with salt are found under exquisite imo recipes.



#### *Dengaku imo*

Dishes made with grated raw sweet potato have a different sweetness than those made with mashed steamed potatoes.



*Kabayaki imo*

*Kabayaki* is a method of broiling fish with a sweet soy sauce. This sweet potato cooked with *sansho* (Japanese pepper) and soy sauce is delicious.



Fluffy sweet potato

Fluffy sweet potatoes with soup stock goes down smoothly and leaves you wanting more.

\* Those 3 dishes were prepared and photographed by the writer.

The first documented mention of sweet potato vendors in the city of Edo is from 1793. Volume 5 of *Houryaku genraishu*<sup>6</sup> states "During the winter of the fifth year of Kansei (1793), baked sweet potato vendors hung paper lanterns with the word *hachirihan* on them and sold baked sweet potatoes near the Hongo 4-chome guardhouse." Baked sweet potato vendors did great business during the Bunka and Bunsei eras (1804 to 1830). Similar scenes of the baked sweet potato vendors are depicted in *ukiyo-e* and books from the Edo era. The fact that baked sweet potato vendors still exist to this day attests to the popularity of the sweet potato in Japan.



Depiction of a baked sweet potato vendor

*Meisho Edo hyakkei: Bikunihashi*

*secchu* (100 famous sights in

Edo: Bikuni bridge in snow)

Painted by Utagawa Hiroshige,

published by Uoya Eikichi, 1858.

Available in the [NDL Digital](#)

[Collections](#).

This ukiyo-e depicts the Bikuni

bridge near present-day

Yurakucho station. A baked

sweet potato shop (indicated by

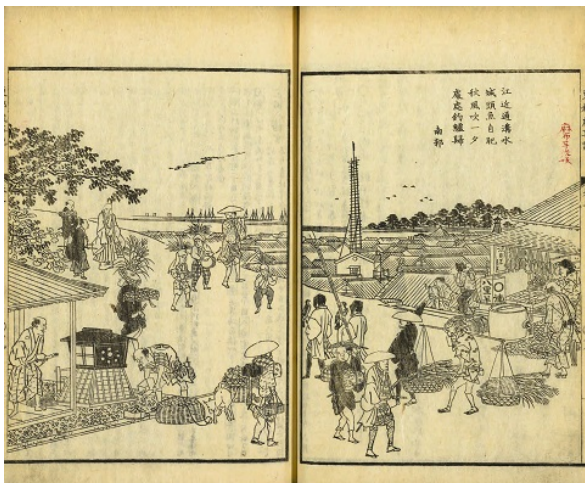
the ○やき sign) is on the right

and a wild-game meat shop is

on the left.

<sup>6</sup> *Houryaku genraishu*. Written by Yamada Keiou. Transcribed copy. 【NDL Call No. 211-537】 Included in *Kinsei fuzoku kenbunshu* Vol. 3, edited and published by Kokushokankokai, 1912, available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#).





*Toto saijiki*, Vol. 4, Supplement 1. Edited by Saito Gesshin, painted by Hasegawa Settan, frame painted by Hasegawa Settei, published by Suharaya Mohe and Suharaya Ihachi, 1838. Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#).

This book introduces annual events in Edo and suburbia of Edo. The baked sweet potato shop is on the right.



*Kanemouke hanano sakariba* by Jippensha Ikku I. Illustrated by Utagawa Yasuhide, published by Yamaguchiya Toube, 1830. Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#).

This book contains a story about a noble princess who goes out to buy baked sweet potatoes.

(Translated by Mika Oshima)

#### Reference (in Japanese):

- *Yakiimo jiten: oishisa, eiyo, hinshu, saibai, yakikata, ryouri, rekishi, bunka. Imorui Shinkokai*, October 2014. [NDL Call No. RB2-L43]

#### Related articles from the National Diet Library Newsletter:

- [Tofu Hyakuchin: A Hundred Delicacies of Tofu - Enjoying taste of Edo](#) (No.191, October 2013)