



THE BASICS

Tools for the Sushi Master

Having the right tools on hand makes it a lot easier and more enjoyable to make sushi, and while some—like a strainer, bowl, measuring cup, and plastic cutting board—you may already have, there are others that you might have to look for in Asian groceries, health-food stores, and an increasing number of supermarkets. Many are inexpensive, and some are optional. But for best results, the first thing you'll need is a set of authentic Japanese knives (info and tips below).

a. ELECTRIC RICE MAKER

Today virtually everyone in Japan uses an electric rice maker. (In fact, most of them have forgotten how to cook rice without one!) Owning an electric rice maker is helpful, but certainly optional.

b. FINE WIRE MESH STRAINER

(Between 7"-9") for straining cooked vegetables or removing bonito flakes from soup.

c. NORI STORAGE BOX

It's always a good idea to store nori in a storage box to prevent it from absorbing moisture. Use an airtight plastic box, or a metal box with a good seal. Either one works fine.

d. PLASTIC OR WOODEN BOWL

(Between 12"-15") for mixing rice with vinegar.

e. STAINLESS STEEL BOWL

For mixing sauces.

f. HONENUKI

Tweezer to remove fish bones.

g. HIBACHI

A compact little barbeque, used with charcoal for broiling seafood, and grilling eel, salmon or tuna.

h. FRAME

For making Youfuu Oshizushi (p. 118).

i. MAKISU

STANDARD BAMBOO SUSHI MAT

Although two kinds are sold, you want the type made with flat slats, usually green on one side. After using, brush out any stray pieces of rice. Rinse under running water with a little soap if desired, and dry thoroughly before storing. Never put a sushi mat in the dishwasher!

j. TEMAKI-YOU MAKISU SUSHI MAT FOR TEMAKI (hand rolls)

About 5" x 5". Instructions for care are the same as for standard bamboo sushi mat. Wooden sushi paddle for transferring rice to hand roll.

k. TOISHI

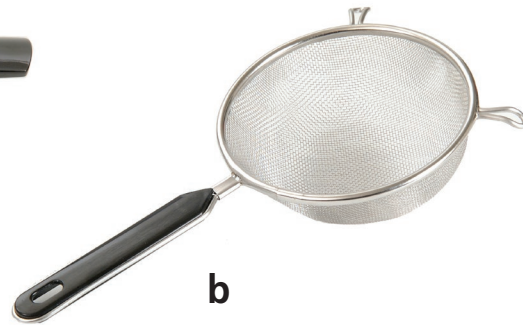
Japanese knife sharpener. This is the best type of sharpener to sharpen Japanese knives. Always keep the stone submerged in water. (For best results, change water every week.)

l. KITCHEN TOWELS

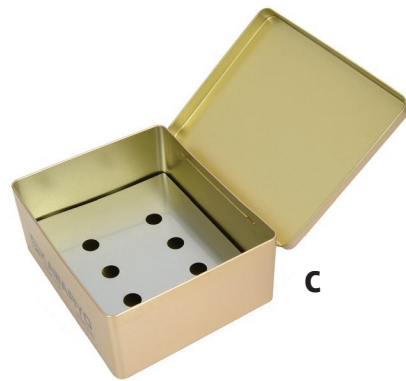
Made of polyester, perfect for drying knife and wiping hands while working. Unlike terry towels, these towels do not leave fibers on the food or work surface.



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m. MANAITA
PLASTIC CUTTING BOARD

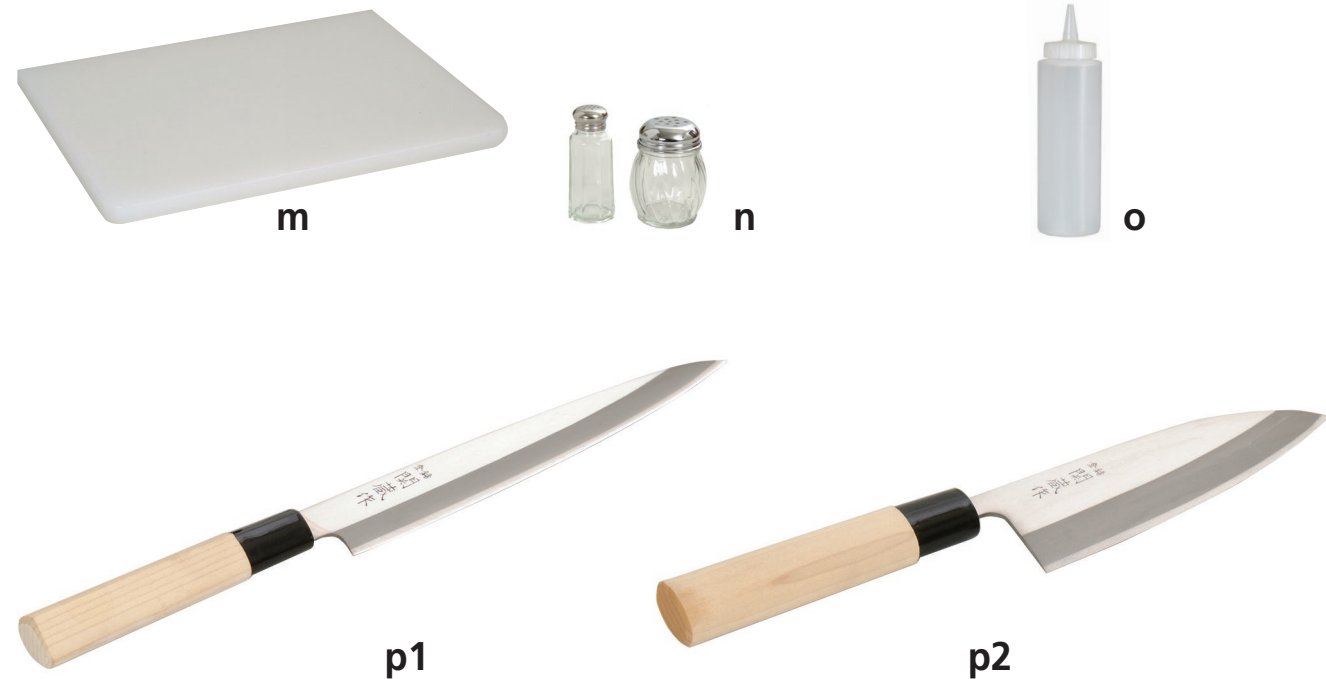
Recommended size: 20" x 10", at least 1" thick. To avoid bacterial contamination, wipe with a little diluted bleach and place in the dishwasher.

n. GLASS SHAKERS

For Shichimi (Japanese chili pepper) and Irigoma (roasted sesame seeds).

o. PLASTIC DRESSING BOTTLE

For sauces.



p. JAPANESE KNIVES

Japanese knives are especially designed for the kind of food we want to prepare. Unlike stainless steel knives, authentic Japanese knives are made with a thin carbon steel blade that is sharper than the conventional stainless steel knife, and does less cell damage to the fish when you slice it. Check to see that the blade is firmly attached to the wooden handle. In this picture we see a long Sashimi Bouchou (p 1), used only to slice boneless fillets. A shorter knife (p 2) is the Deba Bouchou—an all-purpose knife for filleting fish or chicken even if it has bones.

There are many different lengths of knives. To choose the right one for you, lift the knife and feel the weight of it in your hand. If it's too heavy, try another one that's lighter. The blade should be about 12" long (without the handle). Wash the blade with soap and water and dry immediately to prevent staining or rust. If you don't use your knife often, oil it lightly and wrap it up in a towel. Store in a dry place.

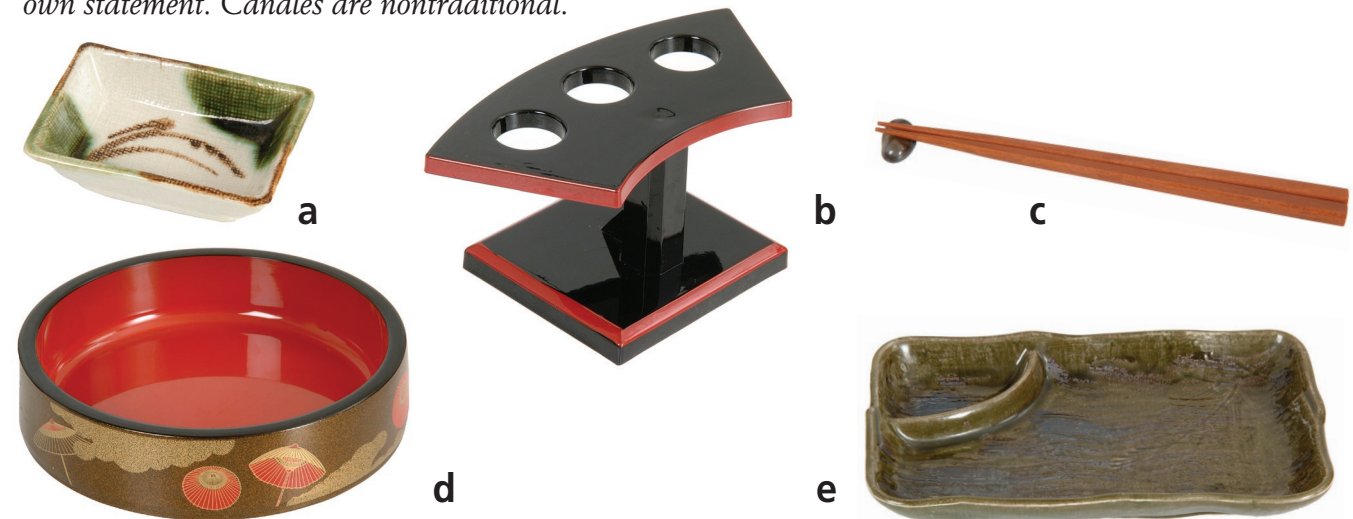
NOTE: Japanese chefs never sharpen their knives just before using, because a freshly sharpened knife affects the delicate taste of fish. Always sharpen the day before you intend to use it!

Tableware

Imagine sushi as an actor and the garnish as its costume. The plate is its stage. If you use a plate that's too busy-looking for serving sushi, you won't be able to see or enjoy the sushi clearly.

On the other hand, you don't really need to have a full set of traditional Japanese dishes to serve sushi, but using the right dishes certainly adds to the atmosphere. There are many places to buy Japanese-style tableware, but if you can't find them, use solid-colored plates in interesting shapes like squares or rectangles (circular plates are inappropriate for sushi).

Unlike Chinese food, which is served from a central serving dish, Japanese set the table so that each person has his own utensils—including a placemat and individual soy sauce bowls. And don't crowd the table with flowers; in Japan, we practice Ikebana—the art of flower arranging—using one or two beautiful flowers that make their own statement. Candles are nontraditional.



a. SHOYUZARA

Dish for soy sauce.

b. TAMAKI-DAI

Stand for serving hand rolls.

c. HASHIOKI

Stand for chopstick; Hashi—chopsticks.

d. SUSHIOKE

Traditional lacquer bowl for serving different kinds of sushi.

e. SASHIMIZARA

Dish for sashimi with a separate compartment for soy sauce (ceramic).

f. JAPANESE APPETIZER PLATE

Can be also be used for serving sushi (ceramic).

g. JAPANESE APPETIZER PLATE

Ceramic.

h. SHIRU-WAN

Wooden soup bowl for miso soup.

i. OCHOUSHI (bottle for sake)

and OCHOKO (cups for sake).

j. YUNOMI

Special green tea cup, for green tea served along with sushi.

k. SHELL CERAMIC DISH

For soy sauce or other condiments.

l. KOZARA (one in front) & KOBACHI (two in back)

Small dish for salad, arranged sashimi, or condiments like pickles.

m. SASHIMI BUNE

Decorative wooden ship for serving sashimi.



**CHOPSTICKS:
Not All Are Created Equal**

Chopsticks are the perfect complement to sushi—and wooden ones are the best to use. But not all chopsticks are created equal. The typical Japanese chopstick is 8" long and made of wood, with a thicker top and a thinner bottom. Koreans use the same shape, but made of silver. The Chinese use much thinner and longer (10") chopsticks made of bamboo, lacquered wood, or plastic, and unlike the Japanese, they often use a spoon to eat rice. Thai people use chopsticks shaped like the Chinese version, and frequently eat rice with a fork or spoon. Why the difference?

I believe that the reason lies in the type of rice we eat—both Japanese and Koreans use a sticky type of rice, easy to pick up and transfer to the mouth with two sticks. But Chinese and Thai people eat a drier type of rice, which doesn't have that "adhesive" quality, making it far more practical to use a spoon for rice dishes—and chopsticks for everything else.

The Japanese Pantry

a. KEZURIBUSHI

Tinted dried bonito flakes, used mostly for soup.

b. NORI

You can judge a quality nori by its color: Good quality nori is black; cheaper kinds are green. To keep fresh after opening, store it in a nori box in a cool place. If you suspect your nori is less than fresh, or if you prefer the taste, toast it by holding the rough side over a flame for just a few seconds. I like to use leftover nori as a sauce for steamed rice: Cook ¼ cup flaked nori, 2 tablespoons mirin, 1 tablespoon sugar, and enough soy sauce to cover the nori over a low flame until thickened. Or cut leftover nori into strips with scissors, and use to garnish soups, fish, or vegetable dishes.



c. UMEBOSHI PLUMS

Small, pink, salted plums used as a condiment. Sold in boxes, bottles, or as a paste, umeboshi plums are believed effective in reducing fatigue, heartburn, and sore throats. Be careful of the pits!

(powdered green tea). Sencha is a lightly toasted green tea with a fresher taste than the other types. A fine tea, it is also usually the most expensive. Bancha has a full-bodied flavor, and is moderately priced. While most restaurants serve Konacha tea because of its bright green color, the other types are preferable.

d. GREEN TEA

In Japan, we're always served a big cup of strong green tea when we sit down at a sushi bar. Like pickled ginger, green tea is used to refresh your mouth before eating and between bites. Sushi bars serve a variety of green teas like Sencha (regular green tea), Bancha (coarse green tea), and Konacha



e. MIRIN

Japanese cooking wine made from sticky rice. Store in a cool dark, place after opening. If unavailable, use double the amount of sake and reduce by cooking to the amount required in the recipe.



f. WAKAME

One of the most popular seaweeds in Japanese cooking, wakame’s mild flavor and soft texture make it very suitable for use in salads, soups, and stews. In Japan, we buy it fresh from the fishmonger, but it’s much easier to find it dried. To use, reconstitute by soaking in cold water to cover for at least an hour before use.

g. SOY SAUCE

There are many different kinds of soy sauce, but the best one to use for sushi is the Japanese type, of course! Chinese soy sauce is aged for a shorter time than traditional Japanese soy sauce, and may contain additives like sugar.



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h. RICE VINEGAR

Rice vinegar is an integral part of sushi rice, and should not be substituted with any other kind of vinegar.

i. TAKUWAN

Pickled daikon (large white) radish. Used in sushi as a condiment or garnish.

j. BLACK SESAME SEEDS

Always toast in a dry frying pan. Use for garnish.



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k. JAPANESE MAYONNAISE

Compared to the mayonnaise in other countries, Japanese mayonnaise has a slightly stronger mustard taste. Substitute regular mayonnaise with a little added mustard, if desired.

l. TOFU

A soy “cheese” made from soy beans, water, and a starter, tofu is a low-calorie, low-fat, high-protein food that Japanese call “meat of the field.” The quality of tofu depends on the water with which it is made. Once you open the package, store tofu in water to cover, and change daily. Keep refrigerated, and use within three days of opening.



h

m. MACCHA

Green tea used on special occasions and in the Japanese tea ceremony. Unlike other green teas, this type requires several steps in its preparation, which makes the ceremony that much more impressive!

n. DASHI NO MOTO

Soup stock made of kombu and fish—usually bonito flakes. While you can use many types of fish to make dashi, I never use sardines because of their strong smell and flavor.



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o. INARI

Deep-fried tofu pockets (Aburage) that are cooked with mirin and sake. In Japan, we buy tofu pockets in tofu shops and cook them at home, but they can be found in most Japanese supermarkets.

p. POWDERED SUSHI VINEGAR

An instant product sold in individual sachets, powdered sushi vinegar is very popular in Japanese homes. To make sushi rice, just sprinkle a little on the rice while it’s hot!



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r. GARI

Pickled ginger is very easy and inexpensive to make at home. See p. 23 for recipe. Ginger is considered one of the oldest and healthiest spices, used in folk medicine throughout the world. In Japan we use ginger peels (from peeling fresh ginger) in tea, or candied in sugar. Try some ginger tea if you feel a cold coming on to soothe a sore throat.

r. MISO

Miso is a fermented soy bean product with a paste-like consistency. Although it is high in sodium, miso also contains B12 and enzymes beneficial for the digestive system (like yogurt). All types are made with soy beans but some have the addition of wheat or barley. Some are light (like Shiro miso) and some are dark (Aka miso). I always like to mix both dark and light miso in soups. Miso can also be used for making pickles: For real Japanese pickles, make a 1" layer of any kind of miso; a layer of firm vegetables like cucumber, radish, or carrots; and another layer of miso (sometimes mixed with a little mirin or soy sauce). Cover and refrigerate for three days before using. Will keep for up to a week.

s. KAMPYO

A type of Japanese pumpkin or gourd that is available dried in strips or tenderized and already seasoned.



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t. DRIED SHITAKE MUSHROOMS

Large dark brown mushrooms that are succulent and almost meat-like in texture. Although fresh shitake mushrooms are available in gourmet stores, we always use dried shitakes for sushi. To reconstitute them, soak in warm water overnight. Remove the stems before use. Shitakes are very healthy—in addition to containing vitamins (like D, B12 and B2) and enzymes, they are considered to having healing qualities. Use leftover water for soups, tempura batter, and cooking fish. The mushrooms can also be used in vegetable stews, soups, sauces, and stir-fries.

u. DRIED KOMBU SEAWEED

Kombu is harvested from the deep, cold water off northern Japan and sun-dried on the beach before packaging. Mostly used for soup stock, reconstituted kombu is also used as a wrap for fish before cooking. Wipe with a towel or brush to remove dust or sand.

In a Pickle: How to Make Pickled Ginger

In the best restaurants and sushi bars, we always make our own pickled ginger, but there are many places (and people) that prefer to buy it ready-made. I often find commercial pickled ginger to be too sweet or to have a chemical aftertaste, and you don't want to taint the taste of delicate sushi or sashimi with chemicals, do you?!

It's easy to make pickled ginger at home, but if you buy it ready-made, be sure to check the ingredients on the package before you buy.

GARI (Pickled Ginger)

Always look for fresh ginger that has as thin a skin as possible. The youngest ginger has skin that's almost translucent. Avoid pieces that look dry or shriveled. They will be tough and fibrous inside.

- 1 pound fresh ginger
- 2 cups sushi vinegar (see recipe p. 36)
- 3 tablespoons salt

Wash and dry ginger. Peel and slice as thinly as possible. Discard any sprouted tips. Place ginger in a bowl and mix in the salt. Let stand three minutes. Rinse and drain to remove salt. Transfer to a glass jar and pour over the sushi vinegar. Cover and let stand in a cool dark place (not in the refrigerator) for at least 1 week before using. Taste and add a little sugar if desired. May be stored indefinitely in the refrigerator, but the ginger flavor will deteriorate after long storage.

The Wonders of Wasabi**WASABI POWDER**

Wasabi is Japanese horseradish, made from an olive-green root with a bumpy skin. The best roots are more than four years old, which make them quite expensive, even in Japan. Most people outside of Japan use powdered wasabi (which is actually made from a non-Japanese type of horseradish). To make wasabi from powder, add a small amount of boiling water to the powder (using boiling water makes the color very bright and brings out the "heat") and mix well. Let stand until room temperature. Although most people garnish plates with a little "hill" of wasabi, you can also shape it like playdough into a leaf or flower shape. Use within a short time or it will lose its "punch."

**WASABI PASTE**

There are many brands of wasabi paste, some (but not most) actually containing real wasabi! For best results, use wasabi paste manufactured in Japan. Wasabi paste is always preferable to powder.

**REAL WASABI: BACK TO THE ROOTS**

If you should happen to get your hands on a fresh wasabi root, you'll also need a shark's skin board to grind it on. You'll find one in an Asian grocery. Peel the root a couple of inches from the top. Hold the root from the bottom and scrape on the board in a slow circular motion. (It will have a mucilaginous quality.) Never use a grater—the wasabi will lose its heat and be chunky rather than smooth.

In Japan, we never add fresh wasabi to soy sauce like we do in the States. Instead, we put a little minced fresh wasabi on top of the fish, and then dip it in the plain soy sauce.