



Umeshu Variations

NIBBLEDISH CONTRIBUTOR

Ingredients

Basic Umeshu

- 1kg Green Ume
- 300g Rock Sugar
- 2L White Spirit

???? - Black Sugar Plum Wine

- 1kg Green Ume
- 150g Rock Sugar
- 150g Black Sugar
- 2L White Spirit

??????? - Cumquat and Honey Plum Wine

- 1kg Ume Plums
 - 200g Honey
 - 150g Rock Sugar
 - 2L White Spirit
 - 500mL Cumquat Liqueur (from Chinese groceries)
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Instructions

The area under my kitchen bench is slowly filling with homemade pickles, jams and various other kitchen concoctions. One of my favourites is Umeshu.

Umeshu is often called "Plum Wine" in English, but in truth ume are not actually plums and the resulting liquor is more like an infused spirit (like a flavoured vodka or spiced rum) than a fermented wine.

Ume are a Japanese fruit more similar to an apricot than a plum. It's two main uses are as a salted and dried condiment (umeboshi), or steeped in alcohol to make the popular umeshu. Around the umeshu bottling season, ume and the other ingredients are readily available all around Japan. Unfortunately, I think those of you in other countries might struggle a little to find what you need. If you can get ume, make sure to use the unripe green fruit, not the yellow fruit which is more commonly used for umeboshi.

The basic method for umeshu is very simple. You need the ingredients listed and a large glass container of around 5L in capacity. Again, in Japan umeshu jars are readily available but if you can't find them a very large pickling jar would be fine.

The sugar should be rock sugar (or 'ice sugar' in Japan). It looks like solid white crystals the size of a coin. Normal sugar will not do, although as you see in the variations you can add a number of different sweeteners together with the rock sugar.

The spirit used also varies greatly. In Japan, people will use shochu or the commercial 'White Spirit' sold in liquor stores at around 35% alcohol by volume. Brandy and vodka are also relatively popular. I will definitely make this with rum one day (whether rum alone or blended with other spirits).

1. Wash the ume and leave in a colander to air dry. Do the same with your jar.
2. Using a skewer, remove the stems from the ume. These should come out quite easily.
3. Layer the sugar and ume in the jar (there is no need to prick the ume, although some recipes do call for this) in alternating layers and then cover with the spirit until fully submerged.
4. Leave in a cool, dark place for at least 3 months, but it is better after 6 or more. You can swirl the container every week or so for the first few months if you like, but this is also not important.

It really is that simple. I usually drunk this over ice or mixed with soda water for a very

sweet and refreshing apertif or digestive.

I made the Cumquat and Honey version in 2007 and I am enjoying it immensely now, and the Black Sugar version last season in 2008. The Black Sugar version took a little longer to mellow in flavour, but after about 12 months was aged nicely.

This year I was unfortunatly out of the country for much of ume season so there is no 2009 vintage resting under my bench, but thankfully this infusion method works for all kinds fruits. I am still on the lookout for what try for 2009. The current front runners are strawberry and pepper, or lemon and red shiso, but I haven't quite decided yet.