**The Origins of Wasabi**

Wasabi is a pungent green paste served as a condiment with many Japanese dishes, particularly sushi and sashimi. It comes from the thick part of the stem, or rhizome (not the root, a common misconception), of the *Wasabia japonica* plant, native to Japan. Wasabi’s eye-watering, tongue-tingling effects are powerful but short-lived.

Like other botanicals, wasabi is thought to have first been consumed for its medicinal properties, with records suggesting it was used as far back as the Asuka period (552–645). A book from the Muromachi period (1336–1573) introduced wasabi as a condiment for sashimi, and as such it was a favorite among the wealthy and powerful. By the eighteenth century, it had become a standard accompaniment to the increasingly popular sushi. Cultivation in the Azumino area only began some 140 years ago, around the middle of the Meiji era (1868–1912).

**Other Benefits**

The use of wasabi has expanded into the world of Western cuisine as well, to compliment dishes such as top-quality beef. But the flavor and spicy kick are not the plant’s only pleasing effects. The ancients included wasabi in the *Honzo wamyo*, a dictionary of medical herbs compiled in the year 918. Today, many people believe that wasabi has antibacterial, anticancer, and anti-inflammatory effects and can be used to slow blood clotting and stimulate bone growth.