**Moritake *Junsai Nabe* (Watershield Hotpot)**

Moritake’s *junsai nabe* is a hotpot specialty featuring locally raised chicken and watershield (*junsai*). It is served between May and August, when *junsai* is in season.

*Junsai* (*Brasenia schreberi*) is an aquatic perennial that grows in shallow, unpolluted ponds. The plant’s unopened buds, which grow just beneath the water’s surface, are plucked by hand from shallow, box-shaped boats. When fresh, the buds have a clear, jelly-like coating that acts as a natural defense. Akita Prefecture produces an astonishing 90 percent of Japan’s watershield, and most of that comes from Mitane.

The broth for the hotpot is a reduced stock made from boiled chicken bones, soy sauce, water, and sake. As in many forms of hotpot (*nabe*), napa cabbage, leeks, carrots, and other vegetables are added. Burdock and Japanese parsley are common local additions. The meat comes from chickens called *hinai-jidori*, a cross between a pedigreed Akita breed and Rhode Island Reds. The *junsai* is usually served on the side, to be dipped in the boiling broth just long enough to warm it before transferring it to one’s own dish.

*Junsai nabe* is often served with *kiritanpo*, another Akita specialty. These hollow dumplings are made by shaping fresh rice around a stick, then are warmed and softened in the *nabe* broth. Other *junsai* dishes, such as *junsai* tempura, sometimes accompany the hotpot as side dishes. Diners may find *junsai* ramen available as well.

Throughout Japan, Akita Prefecture is associated with clear-skinned, beautiful women known as *Akita-bijin*. This image is used to promote Moritake *junsai nabe*, as residents claim it will turn those who eat it into an *Akita-bijin*.