

***Hoto* Noodles**

Hoto are thick, broad noodles made of wheat and served in a vegetable broth. Unlike many other kinds of Japanese noodles, *hoto* are not parboiled. Once the dough is kneaded, dried, and cut, the noodles are simmered along with the rest of the ingredients. Kabocha winter squash is the key ingredient in the rich, sweet broth, and carrots, cabbage, sweet potatoes, and meat are usually thrown into the pot as well.

The origins of the dish are obscure. The *Pillow Book* and other records from the Heian period (794–1185) mention a flour-based paste called *hakutaku*, later pronounced *hoto*. *Hakutaku*, however, appears to have been eaten with azuki beans, and there is no obvious connection to the *hoto* eaten in the Fuji Five Lakes. Wheat was probably adopted out of necessity, since rice was so difficult to grow in the region. Until a few decades ago, every home had a *hoto* chopping board that saw regular use.

One folk etymology links the word *hoto* to a story of how the daimyo Takeda Shingen used his *hoto*, or “jeweled sword,” to cut dough into noodles for his troops. Though it is believed that Shingen’s army ate *hoto* while on the march, and many *hoto* restaurants fly his battle flag, the connection to the name is very likely fiction.