

Tsukemono Yakisoba

Tsukemono yakisoba, or pickled vegetables over pan-fried noodles, is Akiota's twist on regular *yakisoba*, the fried-noodle dish eaten at summer festivals throughout Japan. *Yakisoba* is usually made with chewy wheat noodles, which are stir-fried and mixed with a thick sweet-and-savory sauce. The Akiota version consists of thin noodles fried on a hot plate with meat, vegetables, and *tsukemono* pickles, making for a simple and delicious dish. Unlike other local foods, *tsukemono yakisoba* has a short history: it was invented in 2014.

Tsukemono are a type of pickled vegetable or fruit. Much like Western pickles, *tsukemono* have a tangy flavor and often accompany a main dish. Pickles have long been a staple of the diet in the Akiota region, where the winters are long; in summer, produce is harvested fresh, pressed in salt, and preserved to create a nutritious topping or side dish for healthy eating during the months the town is covered in snow.

Since *tsukemono* often froze in winter or were simply too cold to eat, local people would heat them on a charcoal grill or in a frying pan and eat them as a snack or side dish.

A few local restaurants eventually came up with the idea to top *yakisoba* with grilled *tsukemono*. Now the combination has become a popular and inexpensive dish, whether for a quick lunch or a tasty snack with beer.