

Hiruzen Yakisoba: Classic Dish with a Local Twist

Yakisoba is a popular noodle dish found at nearly every convenience store and festival food stall in Japan. This classic is made by stir-frying wheat noodles on a griddle with pork, cabbage, and a sweet sauce made with Worcestershire and soy sauce—but Hiruzen offers its own regional twist.

Local residents keep the same springy noodles, but prepare them with chicken from the flavor-rich meat of mature hens, sweet local cabbage, and an umami-rich miso sauce. Long cherished as a comforting staple, Hiruzen's yakisoba gained wider recognition after winning a national competition for so-called B-grade gourmet fare: inexpensive, hearty dishes with a strong sense of place.

The dish stands out partly because of its savory meat. Most chicken meat sold today comes from tender young broilers raised to six or seven weeks. Egg-laying hens, meanwhile, remain productive for up to a year and a half, and only then are they sent to market. The hens' age and size are said to make their meat denser and more flavorful. Since small farms traditionally consumed hens only at this stage, their distinctive taste is sometimes referred to as "nostalgic."

The other distinctive feature of Hiruzen yakisoba is its miso-based sauce. Each home and restaurant has its own recipe for the basic blend of miso, onions, garlic, and apples. The exact composition is often a tightly guarded secret, though a chef might go so far as to reveal a key component—swapping out apples for peaches, for example. Among diners, rigorous defense of one's favorite establishment is a local passion.