

Bee Larvae: A Hiruzen Delicacy

Hiruzen is one of several mountainous regions in Japan that have a culinary tradition of eating bee or wasp larvae (*hachi no ko*).

In coastal regions, seafood is a readily available source of protein year-round, but protein was harder to come by in isolated mountain communities. In the past, villagers sought out wild hives as a food source, eating not only the honey (if present) but also the highly nutritious larvae and pupae. Thanks to their diet of royal jelly, bee and wasp larvae contain high concentrations of the essential amino acids used to build proteins, as well as minerals like calcium, magnesium, and zinc.

The larvae and pupae of several species, including yellowjackets, paper wasps, and Japanese carpenter bees, are still eaten in Hiruzen today. One recipe involves sautéing them with soy sauce and mirin, then serving them as a small side dish. Another approach is to use them in *takikomi gohan*, a dish made by steaming rice with seasonings and accents like fried tofu, shiitake mushrooms, carrots, and burdock. Alternatively, the bee larvae can simply be fried and dipped in soy sauce.

Bee and wasp larvae consumption is no longer as widespread as it once was, but the crunchy delicacy can still be found on the menu at some pubs and restaurants in Hiruzen.