

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*.