

Shijimi Meshi

Shijimi meshi is a local specialty in Otsu. The dish has been popular since the early Showa era (1926–1989) and features small freshwater clams (*shijimi*) cooked with rice (*meshi*), ginger, and soy sauce.

The ingredients are all cooked and served together in a small traditional iron pot called a *kama*. In the past, large *kama* were used as cooking pots for boiling rice on a wood-fired stove. Cooking everything together in a *kama* has multiple benefits. The rice absorbs the salty, umami flavor of the clams, and it also sticks to the bottom of the pot and caramelizes nicely because of the soy sauce. The bits of caramelized rice add a slightly crunchy texture, the tiny, soft clams give a burst of flavor, and the strips of ginger bring a zest to the dish, which maintains its heat in the metal pot.

Diners use a wooden rice paddle to serve rice from the pot into a bowl to eat. *Shijimi meshi* is often served as part of a *teishoku* (set meal) with tofu, pickles, and other seafood.

Shijimi meshi is particularly popular in the area around Ishiyamadera Temple in central Otsu. The freshwater clams traditionally used in the dish are a species called Seta *shijimi*, which is native to Lake Biwa and the upper reaches of the Seta River. *Shijimi meshi* is considered a staple of local cuisine and is used by some as a hangover cure, because *shijimi* are believed to be good for the liver.