

## Traditional Kyoto Confectionery (*Kyogashi*) [COLUMN]

*Kyogashi* are a type of traditional sweet specific to Kyoto. These confections are intended to be served alongside whisked *matcha* tea, as they are thought to balance its bitterness while engaging each of the senses.

*Kyogashi* can be called a form of art, as the confections are all one of a kind, handmade in shapes and colors that reflect the season. Sweets made in the spring may be tinted pink to evoke that season's cherry blossoms, while ones served in the autumn may be colored a deep shade of red to symbolize the changing colors of leaves.

Though there are no absolute rules concerning the ingredients, many *kyogashi* are made with beans such as adzuki, which are boiled and turned into a sweet paste called *konashi* by passing them through a fine-mesh sieve. Rice flour is then added to create the desired texture, after which the confection is tinted with natural colorings. Once the base has been made, the sweet is shaped by hand and/or carved to resemble some element of nature such as a fruit or flower, or is rendered in a form that is more abstract.

Different types of *kyogashi* vary by shape, texture, and ingredients. *Namagashi* are soft and smooth confections that should generally be consumed within one day, while *han-namagashi* such as the jelly-like *yokan* are firmer and contain less moisture than *namagashi*. The third major category is *higashi*, or dry sweets, which are often crunchy and may have a texture similar to sugar cubes or rice crackers.

The Nishijin area, with its centuries-long tea traditions, has a vibrant *kyogashi* culture. The three main schools of the Japanese tea ceremony are all headquartered in Nishijin and remain the most important clients of the area's confection artisans. *Kyogashi* are also an integral part of the daily lives of many Nishijin residents, who partake of these artistic sweets on a wide variety of occasions.