

## Shojin Ryori

Buddhist precepts prohibit the taking of life, including that of animals, and believers avoid eating meat. An ascetic vegetarian cuisine called *shojin ryori* that followed these precepts was introduced into Japan from China and India by Buddhist monks in the sixth century, and grew in popularity through the influence of the Zen master Dogen in the thirteenth century. Today, sophisticated and nutritious *shojin ryori*, free of meat, poultry, fish, and eggs, can be found at temples and restaurants throughout the country. There are three *shojin ryori* restaurants in the precincts of Zuikozan Kiyomizudera, all open to the general public.

The meals eaten by Zen monks are expected to be simple, often consisting only of rice, pickles, soup, and possibly one side dish. As the cuisine has evolved, typical *shojin ryori* meals now include soup and three side dishes, plus rice and pickles. The menu is essentially plant- and legume-based. Many dishes are made from soybeans, like tofu in its many variations—such as simple chilled tofu (*hiyayakko*), fried soybean curd (*abura-age*), and freeze-dried tofu (*koya-dofu*). A custard-like tofu made from sesame seeds (*goma dofu*) is also commonly served. These are accompanied by seasonal vegetables as well as foraged wild mountain plants (*sansai*) and local wild herbs.

### *Five Flavors, Five Colors*

A principle known as “the rule of five” is generally followed in *shojin ryori*, meaning that the meal’s ingredients should include at least one each of five colors: green, yellow, red, black, and white—and five flavors: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, and *umami*. Strong seasonings are avoided, and dashi broth, *shoyu* soy sauce, mirin (sweet cooking wine), and miso, as well as vinegar and sesame oil, are used in moderate amounts. These should delicately enhance the natural flavors that have been drawn out by combination and preparation. Particularly pungent flavors like onion and garlic are traditionally avoided, but are increasingly used in “progressive” *shojin ryori*. The key is balance, and a good meal is believed to help the diner achieve a healthy equilibrium of body, mind, and spirit in harmony with the seasons. Care is also taken to avoid wasting ingredients, with vegetable peels and leafy tops being used to make simple broths.