

Local Foods of Totsukawa

(Web)

The people of Totsukawa dealt with their isolation by developing their individual skills and knowledge in a wide range of fields, from swordsmanship to growing self-sustaining crops on their limited land, and finding ways to make the most of their limited harvest.

100-Flower Honey

Among the specialized food products that are prized among local residents is “100-Flower Honey.” The name comes from the way Japanese honeybees drink the nectar little by little from a variety of plants, whereas imported Western bees tend to only take nectar from one type of flower in a given season. The 100-Flower Honey produced naturally by local residents is highly prized for its nutritional value as well as its rich flavor.

Yubeshi

In most parts of Japan, the word *yubeshi* refers to a sweet confection that is often eaten along with Japanese tea. It is made with *yuzu*, an aromatic citrus fruit that is used to bring out accompanying flavors. In Totsukawa, however, *yubeshi* is a preserved food, though also made with *yuzu*. It was once eaten as an energy booster by laborers in the mountains, as well as an accompaniment to winter meals. Today, each family has its own *yubeshi* recipe that has been passed down over generations, and it is eaten as a snack, perhaps sliced with cheese, or as a mealtime accompaniment.

How to Make Yubeshi

Yubeshi is made by hollowing out a *yuzu* fruit, leaving only the peel, and filling it with a mixture of ingredients, of which the main one is miso bean paste. Although no two recipes are exactly alike, one Totsukawa family whose *yubeshi* is highly regarded fills the empty *yuzu* peel with a mix of miso, shiitake mushroom, sesame, seven spices, bonito shavings, sugar, peanuts, canned tuna, canned salmon, monosodium glutamate, and mirin cooking sake. It is steamed for two hours, then put out to dry for one to two months in the winter until cured.

Ikola: An Intimate Farmers Market and Communal Space

Ikola, which means “Let’s go!” in the local dialect, is a homey, one-room regional center where local residents take turns selling their products (including rice balls, fresh vegetables, jams, and preserved foods) to other residents, restaurateurs, and visitors. On a typical day, vendors will chat with their customers over coffee and tea as they finalize a sale. This is an excellent place to make friends, get a feel for local life, and pick up some unusual souvenirs.