

Kinzanji Miso

Kinzanji miso is made from chopped vegetables that are fermented with a koji mold derived from a blend of rice, soybeans, and barley. This coarsely textured miso is eaten as a side dish or as a topping for rice, in contrast to regular miso which is primarily used as an ingredient in cooking.

Kokokuji Temple in the town of Yura is considered the birthplace of Kinzanji miso in Japan. It was there that the monk Shinchī Kakushin (1207–1298) began making the miso. After returning from China, Kakushin assumed the role of head monk at the temple. He propagated Zen Buddhism and introduced techniques and skills he had acquired in China, which included making Kinzanji miso and playing shakuhachi, a type of bamboo flute.

Kakushin is credited as the father of Japanese soy sauce, which originated as a by-product of Kinzanji miso. As the miso is fermenting, liquid accumulates in the bottom of the barrel. It is said that Kakushin was so impressed with the taste of the rich-flavored liquid that he decided to extract some of it. This paved the way for soy sauce production.

Kinzanji miso remains popular in Yura, and many families make their own at home. It is served at some restaurants and accommodations in town and is often sold alongside locally produced soy sauce at stores in the area.