

## ***Wasabizushi***

Many people are familiar with wasabi as a small mound of green paste served together with sushi. In *wasabizushi*, a style of sushi unique to Aridagawa, wasabi is the star ingredient. Portions of vinegared rice are topped with fish or vegetables and wrapped in salt-pickled wasabi leaves that give each bite of sushi a mild spiciness. Alternatively, the sushi is topped only with a mix of grated wasabi root and flowers for a more intense flavor.

*Wasabizushi* is a form of the “quick sushi” (*hayazushi*) traditionally made in the Shimizu district of Aridagawa. *Hayazushi* is prepared by adding fish to vinegared rice and wrapping it in thick leaves, such as Japanese banana or the bamboo-like *ase*. The wrapping makes the sushi portable, and the leaves’ natural antibacterial properties keep the fish from spoiling. As a result, *hayazushi* became a popular item to bring on rice-planting workdays and to festivals and other social gatherings.

*Wasabizushi* was developed by a local chef who sought to create a specialty dish to represent Aridagawa's agriculture. Inspired by the wasabi that grows wild in Aridagawa, he topped vinegared rice with a variety of produce from Wakayama Prefecture—such as Mazuma wasabi, sweetfish, stewed mountain vegetables, and *sanshō* pepper—and wrapped it in edible wasabi leaves. Many restaurants now offer this modern version, which has become a culinary symbol of Aridagawa.