



HOME & GARDEN ALCHEMY

by Thom Leonard



Miso, richly flavored, salty, fermented soybean paste, is a traditional East-Asian seasoning that can easily be incorporated into western-style cooking; in soups, salad dressings, as delicious garnishes or condiments in a variety of savory sauces and spreads, and in place of salt in any main dish or dessert. Rich in enzymes and lactobacillus it aids in digestion as well as being a good source of easy-to-assimilate soy protein.

The three main varieties of miso are barley, red, and soybean. The first two are made with grain. Soybean miso, including hacho miso, is made from only soybeans, salt and water. In addition to these "regular" miso varieties, there are several "special" misos including "finger-lickin' miso" and sweet simmered miso, both of which are used as toppings for grains, vegetables or tofu.

The miso-making process is basically a two-part fermentation. In the first step, grain that has been soaked and steamed until tender is inoculated with spores of a variety of *Aspergillus oryzae* mold and incubated in wooden trays for two days; after this time the individual grains are bound together by a white mycelium; the mold has begun to "digest" the complex starches and proteins of the grain and has created enzymes which will assist in the secondary fermentation. The molding grain or koji, is now mixed with the cooked and

mashed soybeans, salt, water, and a small amount of miso from a previous batch. The mixture is packed into large cedar vats where it remains for at least several months and as long as 3 years for some varieties. During this time, select enzymes, yeasts, and bacteria transform the light tan paste into dark, tasty miso.

Among the many nutritional and health benefits derived from miso:

--a small amount of miso (1 tsp.) eaten at a meal with any whole grain food (rice, pasta, bread, oatmeal, etc.) can increase the available protein by as much as 30-40 percent due to the complimentary amino acid patterns.

--if served without cooking, the bacteria and enzymes present in natural miso serve to populate our defenses with helpful helpful flora in much the same way as yogurt or acidophilus --the long fermentation transforms 80-90% of the soybeans nutrients into simpler, easy to digest forms. Boiled soybeans are only 68% digestible. The now famous trypsin inhibitor is also deactivated in the miso-making process.

--miso is one of the few vegetable sources of vitamin B12 (others include various sea vegetable and fermented soy and grain foods such as shoyu, naffo, tempeh).

--miso is an alkalizer, helping to balance an acidic condition created by overconsumption of sweets, fruit, and animal products.

--it is now believed that miso eaten daily helps to prevent radiation sickness and expels radioactive and other toxins from the system. Japanese folk culture has long held that miso soup rids the body of nicotine from cigarette smoking. Japanese traffic policemen eat miso soup regularly to alleviate the effects of automobile pollution.

Healthful as it is, miso need not be taken like a medicine, eating a spoonful in the morning because it is good for you. The rich, hearty flavor of miso is a delicious complement to the light flavors of a grain and vegetable diet. The simplest traditional preparation is miso soup; or substitute 1 1/2 tsp. miso for each 1/4 tsp. salt in any recipe. Before adding it to other ingredients, cream it with a small amount of liquid (water, stock) so that it can be easily and evenly incorporated.

BASIC MISO SOUP

Thinly sliced onion
Thinly sliced carrot
Soaked, drained and cut wakame
Stock or water
Miso (1 tsp, more or less, per cup of liquid)

Add the onion and carrot to simmering stock. When tender, add wakame, simmer briefly, then add creamed miso. Remove from heat, and serve; also good with small cubes of drained tofu in the soup.

MISO GRAVY

2 TB oil
1 small onion, minced
3 TB fine whole wheat flour
1 1/2 TB miso

Saute the onion until lightly browned, in one TB oil, add rest of oil and flour, stirring constantly until nutty aroma is present and flour is lightly browned. Add miso, saute for 30 sec. Add water, a little at a time, continuously stirring, bring to a boil (add pepper, herbs if desired) and simmer until thick. Serve over steamed vegetables, grain, mashed potatoes, biscuits and gravy.

Miso, like tofu, is a traditional East Asian soybean food that can be prepared in small shops or at home and that lends itself to infinite adaptation to western cuisine while providing high quality, inexpensive protein for the lean years ahead. Your Community Mercantile now stocks hacho, barley and delicious brown rice miso.

Much more information and many more recipes can be found in the *Book of Miso* or the pamphlet "What is Miso?" both by Bill Shurtleff and Akiko Aoyagi also available at the Mercantile.



ANGER & OPPRESSION: a conference

The Ozark Food Co-op and the Federation Warehouse in Fayetteville, Arkansas have been struggling around the issue of sexism

and its companion -isms (racism, ageism, classism, etc.) for the past several months. It has been a process fraught with dissent, solidarity, emotion, reason, and pain. The struggle is so much a part of their day-to-day existence that it seemed only natural

it should manifest itself at the March meeting in Fayetteville as it had at previous meetings of the Federation. Perhaps feeling outside the struggle or unable to deal with it, most Federation members looked for a path of least resistance. But at the most recent meeting, we began to realize that the Fayetteville struggle was our struggle too. We were not perfect. We had not transcended these problems. There is no reason why the struggle happening now in Fayetteville or one similar to it could not or should not happen here.

People with special knowledge in these areas are encouraged to come as long as they plan not to become domineering "speakers." The emphasis is on the personal and experiential rather than the general and theoretical. We hope to examine not only how we are oppressed but more importantly how we perpetuate oppression. The structure of the weekend will be decided by those who participate.

Participants should plan to fend for themselves. The only thing provided is a few acres of central Arkansas. So bring your sleeping bag, food, and friends. For more information, contact a store coordinator at the Community Mercantile. Ask to see some of the newsletters coming out of Fayetteville these days. You might find that the product of struggle is growth and that's what it's all about, isn't it?



Recognizing this, the Federation is sponsoring a weekend of discussion entitled "Anger and Oppression" on May 6, 7, and 8 in Leslie, Arkansas. Topics for discussion include but are not limited to Sexism, Economics, Racism, Nutrition, Ageism, Land Reform, Classism, Nuclear Power, etc.

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