

## LESSON TWO

### ***Kuro Mamé*** dried black (soy) beans



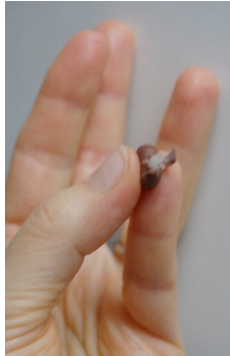
This sheet is a primer on dried black bean cookery... how best to tender-cook the beans in preparation for making a variety of sweet dishes. For those who choose a vegan diet, packing desserts and sweet snacks with plant-based protein (dried soy beans) will help balance daily nutritional requirements.

The key to dried bean cookery is patience. Typically one or more days are needed, from start to finish. Your patience will be well rewarded as the results can be stored in the refrigerator for 10 days in an ordinary glass jar, or if treated to a water bath and a paraffin seal (as you would jams or jellies) they will keep for 2 months.

Allow yourself enough time to fully soften the beans before cooking them and be prepared to keep a watchful eye on the pot while the beans are cooking. **BEANS MUST BE COMPLETELY TENDER BEFORE ADDING SEASONINGS** (sugar syrup and a drizzle of soy sauce, in this case). Throughout the soaking and cooking process, the beans need to remain completely submerged in liquid to prevent wrinkling. Lay a dampened cloth (the Japanese use muslin-like *sarashi*) across the beans as they soak and cook to ensure this. As the beans cook, the cloth will discolor – rinse in plain water and re-use the cloth on future batches.

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Check beans for tenderness: Take a bean from the pot, and when cool enough to handle comfortably, hold it between your thumb and pinkie and press gently. It should yield easily. (This pinch test is accurate because the pinkie is usually a “weak” finger and can exert less pressure in the pinch. If a simmered bean can yield to this weaker pressure, you can be sure it is tender.)



Combine sugar and water; stir and cook to make syrup (below).



Once the beans are tender-cooked, add the sugar syrup (left, below). Rapidly reduce the syrup while beans are covered with cloth (right, below):



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Let the sweet-simmered beans cool in the pan with the cloth in place.



### TECHNIQUES for HOLDING DEEP, BRIGHT COLOR

The technique described in the original Sweet Black Beans recipe (page 238) calls for baking soda to help hold the lustrous black color of the soybeans. That was primarily to accommodate readers living outside Japan. The classic Japanese “granny” method calls for rusty nails – not the drink, Rusty Nail, made with scotch and Drambuie garnished with a lemon twist – but actual rusted iron. The Japanese believe that using rusty iron when cooking certain foods not only improves color, but nutrition as well.



In the past few decades, “imitation” rusty nails have come on the market in Japan. These are specially fashioned chunks of iron, like the one pictured above, right. As you might have gathered from the shape, the primary use for these iron chunks is to hold the purple color on eggplant (when pickling, when stewing). I bought the one pictured here at Tokyu Hands (in Shibuya) several years ago in their *katei yōhin uriba* (housewares section).

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*Yaki myōban* (alum powder) and/or baking soda works similar chemical magic to rusted iron. Both alum and baking soda have the added advantage of speeding fiber breakdown, tenderizing beans more quickly. As the beans simmer, *aku* (froth, scum) is thrown off. This includes the unwanted bitterness generated by the alum or baking soda. If you skim diligently, as instructed in the original recipe, the beans will look beautiful, and taste divine.

Below, 2 brands of *yaki myōban* available in many Asian markets outside Japan. Within Japan, most supermarkets will sell one or the other.

