

Dia de Portugal, June 11, 2011

Inarizushi with Linguica ***Da Cone Kine***

In the 70's, a Japanese friend taught me her family's recipe for inarizushi. Her mother added dried shitake mushrooms and carrots, simmered in soy sauce, sugar, and sake, to the seasoned rice. I have replaced the mushrooms with finely diced Portuguese linguica in honor of my heritage. For the classic recipe, omit the linguica. Wash ten dried shitake mushrooms; simmer with the carrots. Squeeze the mushrooms to remove the excess liquid; discard the stems. Finely chop them and add them to the seasoned rice with the carrots.

Yield: 40 inarizushi (quantity may vary based on the size of the tofu "cone")

Sushi Rice:

3 cups Japanese sushi rice
1-1/4 cups Japanese rice vinegar
1/3 cup plus 1 tablespoon sugar
1 teaspoon salt

1. Wash the rice several times. Cover the rice with fresh water; soak about 1/2 hour. Drain and rinse the rice a couple times. Add cold water until it reaches 1 inch above the level of the rice—the authentic way is to measure up to the first joint on your index finger. (At this point, use a rice cooker or follow the rice cooking instructions in step #2.)
2. Bring the water to a boil. Cover and cook the rice over medium-high heat until the water is boiled away, 8 to 12 minutes—but CHECK THE WATER LEVEL A COUPLE TIMES to prevent burning the rice, removing the lid and replacing it quickly. Reduce the heat to low; steam 15 minutes **without** removing the lid. Remove from the heat; let stand 10 minutes. Fluff with a fork (if using a rice cooker, when the rice is ready, fluff it with a fork).
3. Meanwhile, prepare the *awase-zu* (seasoned vinegar). Combine the vinegar, sugar, and salt in a small bowl; stir until dissolved. Turn the hot rice out into a large bowl (preferably wooden). Pour about half of the seasoned vinegar over the warm rice; let stand a few minutes. To mix, cut into the rice with a wooden spoon (instead of stirring, which mashes the rice). Add more of the seasoned vinegar to taste (you might not need all of it); stir gently. If you have a helper, have them use a fan to help cool the rice and make it glisten. Taste the rice—it should be well seasoned and not too wet. Cover the rice with a cloth.

Inarizushi (continued)

Tofu (Age), Carrot, and Linguiça Preparation:

20 whole Japanese *age* (see *Note, below)

Boiling water (a teakettle full)

1-1/2 cups cold water

3/4 cup sake

2/3 cup sugar

6 tablespoons Japanese soy sauce

1 link fully cooked linguiça (about 7 ounces)

3 medium carrots, peeled

4. Cut the *age* into halves crosswise to form pouches. (Note, if using canned *age*, they are already cut). Put the *age* into a large, heatproof bowl; cover with the boiling water. Drain; rinse under cold water. Drain again. When cool enough to handle, squeeze one piece of *age* at a time to remove excess water.
5. Put the 1-1/2 cups cold water into a large saucepan; add the sake, sugar, and soy sauce. Stir to dissolve sugar; bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low; add the *age*. Simmer 20 minutes—do not let the *age* fall apart. (If using canned *age*, simmer 15 minutes). Use a slotted spoon to transfer the *age* to a colander to cool. RESERVE THE COOKING LIQUID in the saucepan.
6. Meanwhile, cut the linguiça in half crosswise and then slice in half lengthwise. Brown the linguiça on both sides in a small skillet. Add the linguiça and carrots to the saucepan with the reserved cooking liquid (add water, if needed to cover halfway). Simmer until the carrots are just barely tender, 4 to 6 minutes (do not cook too long or grating will be impossible). Drain; transfer the carrots and linguiça to a cutting board. When cool enough to handle, grate the carrots and finely dice the linguiça. Add to the rice; again, cut into the rice with the edge of a wooden spoon, without mashing the rice, until the carrots and linguiça are well distributed.
7. Have handy a shallow bowl of water and a clean damp kitchen towel. Open one *age* pouch at a time; hold it in one hand and dip the other hand into the bowl of water. (Alternatively, use disposable gloves—the rice doesn't stick to them.) With the wet hand (not dripping), carefully stuff the *age* with rice. The *age* should appear wrinkled when filled—if not, it is too full. Wipe hands as needed on the damp towel. Arrange the inarizushi with the rice side on a platter. Serve immediately or refrigerate until serving time.

Make-ahead Notes: The sushi is best eaten soon after making it, but it can be made a day ahead. To store, cover the platter of sushi tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate (cooked rice is perishable). Bring out of the refrigerator about 15 minutes before serving.

Serving suggestions: Inarizushi is great picnic food or a snack. It is also a good starter before a Japanese meal or as part of a sushi course with a variety of sushi.

* Note: *Age* are fried tofu that are hollow in the middle. (They may not look hollow until after cooking them in step #5—if they have excess spongy matter in the middle, gently remove it.) Look for them in the refrigerator section of Japanese markets, either bulk or in packages. They are also sold in cans but fresh are preferable. Fresh *age* freeze well.