



O-Hitashi: Mini Spinach Towers

O-Hitashi is a traditional dish served in Japan. The term refers to any fresh vegetable that has been lightly boiled and made into a salad. This version is simple, yet elegant in its presentation, topped with toasted sesame seeds. Long leaf Japanese spinach works best, but you may use baby spinach.

4 servings

Ingredients

2 pounds tender spinach or baby spinach
3 tablespoons tamari soy sauce
2 tablespoons dashi stock or mirin
2 tablespoons sesame seeds
Salt, to taste

Preparation

Toast the sesame seeds:

Put the sesame seeds in a dry sauté pan and stir or toss constantly just until they are toasted and start to pop. Remove from the heat and set aside on a plate until ready to use.

Boil the spinach:

Prepare a pot of lightly salted boiling water, and have a “spider” or slotted spoon ready. If using long-leaf spinach, hold the leafy part and place the stems in the boiling water first. After 15 seconds, drop in the leaves and cook for another 20 seconds. If using baby spinach, place all in the pot at once and boil for only 15 seconds. Lift the spinach out with a spider and immediately place under cold running water to stop the cooking. Squeeze out all the excess water by hand, and form into a large ball.

Mix the soy sauce and dashi, then pour over the spinach. Mix well and leave to macerate.

[Chef's Note: Dashi is a staple stock in Japan, made with dried konbu kelp and shaved bonito flakes. While not difficult to make, it can be rather difficult to find the ingredients outside of specialty stores or Asian markets, but a powdered dashi mix is widely available, and will work well in a pinch. If you can't find dashi powder, you may substitute water or mirin.]

Drain the spinach and squeeze out the excess liquid with your hands. Form the spinach into a log shape about 1 ½ inches in diameter, twisting the stems a little so the whole mass stays together. Using a very sharp knife to achieve a flat edge, cut into 2 ½- inch cylinders and form again into rounded mini-towers, squeezing them together again to make them firm and hold together. Sprinkle lightly with salt, to taste, and dip one cut edge into the plate of sesame seeds, pressing firmly to adhere. Place standing up on plates (seeded side up) and serve.

Variations

As O-Hitashi is a general technique, you may use any vegetables or fresh greens, such as arugula, watercress, or deep green lettuce.

This dish may also be served simply and more casually in a dish, without forming into towers.

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