

Chirashi In Autumn



As the autumn leaves begin to scatter in the wind, I am reminded of a November visit to Japan where I not only enjoyed the changing colours of the trees but a visit to the famous Tokyo fish market where I encountered chirashi. Chirashi means *scattered*, a descriptive name for unassembled sushi served in a rice bowl. Raw or cooked pieces of fish, shellfish and vegetables are put on top of sweet, vinegared Japanese rice. The freshness of the fish at the Tsukiji market was amazing and although the concept of eating a raw prawn was a little daunting at first, it tasted just fine. Putting pieces of salmon, tuna, avocado, cucumber, fish roe on top the cooled rice can be done by fanning out the slices in little clusters according to type or by a random placement of everything. As with anything in Japan both approaches are done artfully. However, it is not meant to be a fussy dish but one easily and quickly prepared at home without the skill of a sushi master. Contrasts of colour and texture are key to an attractive chirashi and freshness of ingredients is a given. Sushi grade fish is getting easier to buy at Japanese grocers and

fishmongers around Melbourne but if you are out of luck a lightly poached and flaked salmon works well too. Another ingredient that is delicious to add to chirashi is roasted nori (seaweed sheets used for nori rolls). It can be bought in packets as small roasted strips or you can briefly pass a nori sheet over the gas flame and cut it with scissors yourself. I find the texture and taste of crispy nori is fabulous and can understand why Japanese stores also sell hand rolls with the nori sheet separated from the rice roll by cellophane, allowing you to assemble it just before eating.



chirashi from Tokyo fish market

Some suggested ingredients for chirashi

- tuna
- salmon

- kingfish
- cooked prawns
- Yarra Valley caviar
- pickled ginger
- wasabi
- avocado
- cucumber
- daikon
- pickled lotus root
- enoki mushrooms, raw
- plain Japanese egg omelette, sliced
- blanched green beans, sugar snap peas, snow peas or asparagus
- shiso (perilla) leaf
- chives
- roasted nori strips

Simple vinegared rice for chirashi

For Two

- 180 g Japanese rice
- 220 ml water
- 50 ml rice bran vinegar
- 1 1/2 tbs caster sugar
- 1/2 tsp salt

Wash the rice well under running water and then place it in a small, enamel cooking pot with the water and leave to soak for 15-30 minutes. Heat the rice until it starts to boil, then turn down to a very low simmer and cook with a tight fitting lid for 13 minutes. This is the best method for cooking small amounts of rice. Gently warm the vinegar, sugar and salt until dissolved. Using a wooden paddle moistened with water, spread the warm rice out on a tray and then sprinkle the seasoned vinegar over the paddle to help spread it over the rice. Gently mix through by moving the paddle up under and then over the rice a few times. Fan the rice as you do this to rapidly

cool it and stop it becoming mushy. When the rice is completely cool divide it into two rice bowls and scatter your chosen ingredients on top.