

## Soba with Shoyu-Mirin Sauce

**Time:** About an hour top to bottom

In Japan, masters trained from childhood make soba—fresh noodles made from 100 percent buckwheat flour—by hand. Pure buckwheat noodles are difficult to fabricate and famously driven to break. We had to cheat. It was pretty gratifying to create these easy-to-make à la minute noodles from our own flour, *Ni-Hachi Sobakoh*, a custom blend of fresh, mountain-grown Japanese buckwheat flour and our Farina di Maccheroni 00, a superfine pasta flour made from wheat. Buckwheat flour alone is difficult to work with because it is weak, lacking the strength given to wheat flour by a protein called gluten. In blending the two flours—and thus skewing our soba slightly toward ramen—we have managed to reduce this noodle’s susceptibility to fracture and keep the buckwheat flavor high at the same time.

The noodles themselves conjure herbs, wet earth, and dark, roasted tea. Here they are served at room temperature in a chilled sauce that starts with *dashi*—a broth flavored with *katsuobushi* (dried bonito tuna flakes) and *kombu* (dried kelp) that’s used in much Japanese cookery. We cool the *dashi* and add sparkling liquid aromatics—*shoyu* (Japanese soy sauce), *mirin* (rice wine), and a few drops of *citrusy yuzu* vinegar. (These Japanese ingredients are available in specialty markets and online.) But soba are miraculously versatile at any time of year. We like them just as well in the winter, served in a hot dashi bath with roasted shiitakes.

## Equipment Mise en Place

For these noodles you will need a heatproof glass measuring cup, a food processor, a rolling pin, a bench knife or chef’s knife, a pasta machine, a drying rack (real or improvised—a wooden rack for drying clothes works extremely well and a suspended broom handle will do in a pinch), a stockpot, a pair of tongs, and a colander.

For the sauce you will need a small saucepan, a pair of tongs, and a fine, conical sieve.

## Ingredients

*For the soba*

1 cup (5 ounces) Anson Mills *Ni-Hachi Sobakoh*

1/2 teaspoon fine sea salt, plus 1 tablespoon table salt for the water used to cook the noodles

Generous 1/3 cup (about 6 1/2 tablespoons, or 3 fluid ounces) spring or filtered water, boiling

## Cooking Remarks

Boiling water is used in the recipe for the dough to gel the starch present in the glutenfree buckwheat component of our sobakoh (the Japanese term for the flour used to make soba). When this starch is elastic, warm, and hydrated, it interacts with the glutenous properties of the wheat flour in our sobakoh to help create an extensible dough.

The hydration of this dough is sensitive—it can jump from too dry to too wet tout de suite. Any number of factors—your measuring technique, your measuring cups, and the way in which you’ve stored the flour—may necessitate minor adjustments of water or flour once you’ve first mixed the dough. Feel free to make these adjustments, but do so cautiously, as directed in the recipe below.

Soba, which are intended to be eaten fresh, are generally prepared, cooked, and consumed on the same day. Don’t make the noodles too far in advance of serving. To keep the cooked noodles from sticking, you can spray them lightly with vegetable oil and hold them at cool room temperature.

Traditionally, soba are served

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## For the sauce:

- 1 (6-inch) frond *kombu* (dried kelp)
- 1/2 cup packed *katsuobushi* (dried bonito tuna flakes, preferably wide-shaved)
- 2 cups spring or filtered water
- 1 tablespoon Japanese soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon *mirin*
- 1/2 teaspoon *yuzu* vinegar (optional)

## For the garnishes:

- 1 tablespoon sesame seeds, toasted in a dry pan over low heat until golden
- 1 sheet nori (dried seaweed), cut into quarters with scissors and toasted in a hot, dry pan for a few seconds per side, then sliced or crumbled
- 1 small piece daikon radish, peeled and coarsely grated
- 1 scallion, white and green part, thinly sliced
- 1 tablespoon wasabi, stirred into a paste, according to directions on packaging (optional)

## Directions

- 1. To make the dough:** Place the *sobakoh* in the bowl of a food processor. Bring water in a kettle to a boil. Measure the salt into a heatproof glass measuring cup and pour boiling water to a level slightly above the 1/3-cup line (about 3 fluid ounces). Stir to dissolve the salt. With the food processor running, pour the water through the feed tube. Run the food processor until the dough chases itself around and forms a ball, about 20 seconds. If the dough remains crumbly, add hot water, 1/2 teaspoon at a time, with the machine running. If the dough feels extremely soft and sticky, add *sobakoh* by the teaspoon, running the machine between additions.
- 2.** Turn the dough out onto a work surface and knead lightly for a couple of minutes without adding more *sobakoh*—it should have the consistency of smooth, supple, strong pasta dough. Flatten the dough into a 4- or 5-inch disk and place in a bowl covered very lightly with plastic wrap. (Do not seal the wrap around the bowl—steam must be allowed to escape.) Let the dough cool and rest for 20 minutes.
- 3. To make the sauce:** Meanwhile, wipe the *kombu* with a damp paper towel. Place it in a small saucepan, with the water, over low heat. Bring up the heat slowly, but do not allow the *kombu* to boil. When the *kombu* has risen to the surface of the pan, transfer it to a small bowl, using tongs. Set aside. (The *kombu* can be reused for a subsequent brewing of *dashi*.) Increase the heat to medium-high. Stir in the bonito flakes just as

unadorned in individual bowls—or iced on bamboo mats—with their sauce and garnishes passed separately. We prefer a more casual ice cream sundae approach.

the liquid is about to boil. As soon as it does boil, turn the heat down to low and cook very gently, without boiling, for 5 minutes.

**4.** Strain the liquid through a fine conical sieve into a small bowl or heatproof glass measuring cup. There will be about 3/4 cup. Stir the soy sauce, mirin, and vinegar, if using, into the hot liquid. Cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.

**5. To make the soba:** Set up the pasta machine. Cut the dough into quarters with a bench knife or chef's knife. Keep three pieces in the bowl lightly covered with plastic wrap. Lightly flour the fourth piece and roll it into a band about 3 inches wide and 6 inches long. Run the dough through the second setting on the pasta machine twice and through the fourth setting twice, adding sobakoh as necessary. The band of dough will be about 10 inches long and 4 inches wide. Hang the dough across a wooden drying rack or a suspended broom handle anchored on both ends. Repeat this process with the remaining three pieces of dough. Dry the sheets of dough for about 30 minutes, turning them occasionally; they should be firm and dryish but not leathery.

**6.** In a stockpot, bring about 4 quarts of water to a boil over high heat and add 1 tablespoon table salt. Set the pasta machine to cut linguine. Flour the bands of dough lightly with sobakoh and feed each through the machine. Loop each batch lightly in half and place the cut soba on a tray or large plate.

**7. To cook the soba:** Gently lower the noodles into the boiling water, taking care not to break them. After about 10 seconds, stir gently with tongs. Cook about 20 seconds longer. Drain into a colander. Flush with cool, running water by running the water over your outstretched hands held over the pasta to protect it. Drain well.

**8. To serve:** Portion the noodles into individual bowls and pass the sauce and garnishes separately. Or garnish and dress the noodles in their individual bowls—it's much less complicated.

**Serves 4 as an appetizer**