Making Sushi

Enjoy fresh sushi without reservations.

Going out for sushi can be a treat, but this popular Japanese cuisine is also fun and easy to prepare at home. Get ready to roll up your sleeves and whip up delectable sushi and sashimi like a seasoned pro with this guide to:

- The tools and ingredients to have on hand
- The types of sushi knives to buy and how to use them
- The most popular sushi recipes and how to make them

Sushi and Sashimi Basics

The words sushi and sashimi refer to two related yet different types of Japanese food that both use fish as their main ingredient.

- Sushi: Raw fish, vegetables, and other ingredients served in or on sushi rice that’s seasoned with vinegar. There are many different sushi varieties, distinguished by their arrangement of rice and other ingredients.
- Sashimi: Raw, thinly sliced seafood served with no other ingredients.

This chart teaches you the skills and techniques required to make sashimi and the seven most popular types of sushi, which are listed below.

- Finger sushi (nigiri)
- Sushi rolls (maki)
- Inside-out rolls (ura-maki)
- Hand rolls (temaki)
- Battleship sushi (gunkan maki)
- Pressed sushi (oshi)
- Scattered sushi (chirashi)

Sushi-Making Tools

You’ll need a number of tools to make sushi. Though you may already have some of them on hand, you’ll probably need to buy others. The following list describes the most important sushi-making tools and the primary use for each. Where applicable, tool care instructions are provided as well.

- Bamboo rolling mat (makisu): To make sushi rolls, you need a rolling mat, which is made from small bamboo sticks held together with cotton string. You should clean your mat with cold water and wipe it dry promptly after each use. A square mat that measures 9 1/2” on each side is best.
- Rice paddle (shamoji): Use this wooden paddle to turn and cool down sushi rice after cooking. The flat, round paddle won't bruise the rice while turning it. Always soak your paddle in water before use to prevent rice from sticking to it.
- Rice cooker: You can cook rice in any heavy-bottomed pot, but an electric rice cooker makes perfect rice every time and requires less work on your part. Look for one with a nonstick interior and a capacity large enough to meet your needs. A 10-cup cooker will make rice for about 5–6 people.
- Flat fan (uchiwa): This lightweight paper fan helps to cool rice by fanning air over it. Use it as you turn the rice with your rice paddle.
- Rice tub (hangiri): Use this short, stout, wooden vessel to cool rice by fanning air over it. Use it as you turn the rice with your rice paddle.
- Sushi knives (hocho): Sushi knives are designed to make the precise cuts in fish and vegetables needed for sushi (for more information, see How to Buy and Care for Sushi Knives and How to Use Sushi Knives). Most pressed sushi molds are wooden, but plastic ones are easier to care for since they don’t require drying after each use.
- Sushi mold (oshibako): This type of mold is used primarily to make pressed sushi, though some molds are used to form finger sushi. Most pressed sushi molds are wooden, but plastic ones are easier to care for since they don’t require drying after each use.
- Grater: Many sushi recipes call for grated horseradish, citrus peel, or ginger, so a small grater is necessary.
- Cloth towels (fukin): Use a damp, lint-free towel to clean your hands and cover rice as it cools.

Common Household Substitutes

If you plan to make sushi only rarely or you prefer to not purchase a lot of specialized equipment, try substituting common household kitchen implements for some of the more specific sushi tools. Though it’s possible to make excellent sushi with substitute tools, the process may require more effort and care.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rice cooker</td>
<td>Stovetop and heavy-bottomed pot</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rice paddle</td>
<td>Flat, plastic or wooden spoon</td>
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<td>Sushi knives</td>
<td>Well-sharpened, conventional knives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flat fan</td>
<td>Electric fan or cardboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice tub</td>
<td>Nonmetallic bowl</td>
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Where to Buy Sushi Tools

The tools and accessories discussed in this section are available at most Asian and Japanese specialty markets, some supermarkets, and any of the following websites:

- www.sushifoods.com
- www.korin.com
- www.asiafoods.com

Nonseafood Sushi Ingredients

Though most people tend to focus on the raw fish when they think about sushi, the nonseafood sushi ingredients are also important.

What to Stock in Your Pantry

Some sushi ingredients are sold dried or bottled and can be stored at home. The list below contains the most essential sushi ingredients—used in nearly all sushi-making—as well as those used less often.

Essential Sushi Ingredients to Stock

- Kelp (kombu): This type of seaweed is available cooked, pickled, and dried and is used to flavor sushi rice. It’s best to choose dark green kelp sold in clear packaging and store it in an airtight container.
- Nori: These dried sheets of seaweed are used to make most sushi rolls. The best nori is dark green, almost
black. You should cut it to a size that fits your bamboo mat and store it in a dry, airtight container.

- **Pickled ginger (gari):** This common sushi garnish is used often to cleanse the palate between bites of different sushi. Sliced pickled ginger is sold in small jars and usually presented in a small pile on the side of a sushi dish. Be sure to refrigerate it after opening.

- **Rice vinegar:** The primary flavoring used in sushi rice, it should be pale yellow and have a mild but tart flavor. Avoid rice vinegar marked “seasoned.”

- **Soy sauce (shoyu):** This is a dipping sauce for sushi. Dark soy sauce, which has less salt, is usually best.

- **Sushi rice:** Store this Japanese short grain rice in a dry, airtight container.

- **Togarashi:** Mix these Japanese hot pepper flakes with mayonnaise, then add the mixture to minced fish to create “spicy” sushi such as spicy tuna rolls.

- **Wasabi:** This extremely hot, green horseradish root is ground into a paste and served as a condiment with sushi. Wasabi is sold in both paste and powder forms. The paste is sold in convenient tubes but loses its flavor quickly once the tube is opened. Powdered wasabi retains its flavor well and can be made into a paste by mixing equal parts powder and water.

### Optional Sushi Ingredients to Stock

- **Bonito flakes:** This crunchy sushi garnish made from dried, cured bonito fish is available in jars or packets.

- **Dried mushrooms:** Dried mushrooms are rehydrated and used as a filling in sushi rolls. They usually have a stronger flavor than fresh mushrooms. To rehydrate dried mushrooms, pour hot water over them, let them steep for 20–30 minutes, then drain the water.

- **Mirin:** A sweet, yellow wine made from rice, mirin is used to sweeten eel used in sushi.

- **Ponzu sauce:** This sashimi dipping sauce is made from soy sauce, mirin, kelp, sake (a Japanese alcohol), bonito flakes, and a type of citrus called yuzu.

- **Sesame seeds:** This garnish is sold in both black and white varieties. Sprinkle sesame seeds onto the exterior of inside-out rolls (rolls with rice on the outside) or on top of other types of sushi rolls. Though they’re sold toasted, you should toast sesame seeds briefly to revive their flavors before using them.

### Fresh Vegetables

Sushi recipes often call for a variety of vegetables. Some of the most common are cucumber, shitake mushrooms, scallions, and avocado. Many sushi recipes also require vegetables that may be less familiar, including:

- **Daikon radish:** This large, Asian radish has a sweet yet pungent flavor. It’s often shredded and served as a garnish with sushi and sashimi. You should peel off its outer skin before using it.

- **Lotus root:** This is the root of the water lily. It has reddish skin, white flesh, and a coconut-like flavor. It’s usually peeled, boiled in water, sugar, and rice vinegar, and served in slices as a garnish or side dish.

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Since the quality of sushi relies heavily on freshness, it’s best to buy vegetables the day you plan to make sushi.

### Sushi Seafood

The most prominent ingredient in most sushi (and the only ingredient in sashimi) is **seafood**, primarily fish. Different types of fish will lend very different flavors and textures to the sushi you make. Seafood bought in season usually tastes better and is often less expensive. But it can be difficult to discern the peak seasons for different seafood, since their seasons vary according to region. Check with your local fish market to determine which fish are fresh, available, and in season in your area. The following list describes eleven of the most popular types of sushi seafood.

- **Crab (kani):** Crab has a fresh, clean taste and springy texture. In sushi, it’s served cooked rather than raw. You can buy live crab and cook it yourself, but it’s easier to buy cooked crab packaged in containers labeled ** Lump crab meat**.

- **Eel (unagi):** Eel served as sushi is usually steamed and dipped in mirin. Its texture is soft with a slight crust. Eel is sold precooked year-round in vacuum-sealed packs.

- **Mackerel (saba):** Rich, oily, and fishy in flavor, mackerel served as sushi is often salted, marinated in a vinegar mixture, and served with a grated ginger garnish. Though it sounds related, horse mackerel (ajii) is actually a completely different species from regular mackerel and has a milder flavor. Both types are often served with the skin on.

- **Octopus (tako):** Octopus has a fresh taste and a firm, almost chewy texture. Its tentacles are often sliced and used in hand rolls or sushi rolls.

- **Red snapper (tai):** Japanese red snapper is highly prized for its flaky, red-and-white flesh. Because red snapper can be difficult to find outside of Japan, domestic snapper, sea bream, and porgy are often used as substitutes.

- **Salmon (sake):** By far the most popular sushi fish in America, salmon has a rich, strong taste and a buttery texture. Wild salmon is generally considered superior in quality to farmed salmon. Pacific wild salmon is available from early summer through early fall, while Atlantic wild salmon is in season from summer through early winter. Farmed salmon is available year round.

- **Shrimp (ebi):** Shrimp is usually cooked when served as sushi, but some adventurous sushi eaters enjoy it raw. Raw shrimp is sweeter and more tender.

- **Tuna (maguro):** Tuna served as sushi varies in color and flavor depending on the type of tuna and the part of the fish from which it comes. **Yellowfin tuna** has pale pink flesh and a strong flavor. **Bluefin tuna** is lighter than yellowfin in both color and flavor, and is generally considered superior. **Toro** is tuna that comes from the fattiest section of a bluefin’s belly and has a melt-in-your-mouth soft texture. Fresh tuna is generally sold in large blocks.

- **Yellowtail (hamachi):** A lean fish with golden flesh, yellowtail has a mildly smoky flavor and buttery texture. Though yellowtail can be difficult to find in standard fish stores, you may be able to buy it from your local sushi restaurant.

Though the above list covers some of the most popular types of seafood used in sushi, it’s by no means exhaustive. Other seafood often used in sushi and sashimi include arctic char, bonito, cod, clams, flying fish roe (masago), halibut, herring, lobster, oysters, salmon roe, sardines, scallops, and striped bass. Part of the fun of making sushi is experimenting with new seafood and other ingredients.

### Buying Seafood

When buying seafood, two key factors to consider are:

- Whether the fish is filleted or whole
- The freshness of the fish
1. Place a bamboo mat on the counter with the slats of bamboo parallel to the counter’s edge.

2. Lay a sheet of nori on the mat with its shiny side down. The edge of the nori should be parallel to and flush against the edge of the mat closest to you.

3. Moisten your palms and fingers with a mixture of four parts water and one part rice vinegar so the rice won’t stick to your hands. Make sure your hands are not dripping wet so the nori stays as dry as possible.

4. For a thin roll, spread 1/2 cup of sushi rice evenly across the nori, leaving a margin of 3/4” of nori uncovered on the side farthest from you. For a thick roll, spread 1 cup of rice evenly across the nori, leaving 1” uncovered on the side farthest from you.

5. Place the flavorings (such as wasabi) and fillings (fish and vegetables) width-wise across the center of the nori. Take care to keep the fillings in a single, compact line.

6. Lift the edge of the mat closest to you with your thumbs so that a curve forms in the mat around the roll. You may have to use your fingers to keep the fillings from falling out.

7. Roll the mat onto itself until its edge hits its flat part at a right angle. While holding the rolled part of the mat in place, tug on the far end of the flat part of the mat to tighten the roll.

8. Pull the top of the mat forward. The roll will follow the curve of the mat and roll over the edge of the nori that wasn’t covered by rice.

9. If the nori doesn’t stick to itself after you’ve finished rolling, let the roll rest for a few minutes on its seam. Moisture from the rice should cause the nori to stick.

10. Cut the roll using a sashimi-bocho or any other sharp knife. First cut the roll into two halves, then halve those into four pieces, and finally, halve the remaining pieces into eight pieces.

How to Make Inside-Out Rolls (Ura-Maki)

Inside-out rolls, or ura-maki, are a popular variation on traditional sushi rolls. In this type of roll, the rice is on the outside of the nori, and the nori surrounds the ingredients in the roll. To make an inside-out roll, begin by preparing the fillings as you would for a sushi roll.

Making Inside-Out Rolls Step-by-Step

1. Place a bamboo mat on the counter with the slats of bamboo parallel to the edge of the counter. Cover the mat with plastic wrap.

2. Place a 4” × 7” piece of nori shiny side down on the plastic wrap so that it’s flush against the edge of the mat closest to you.

3. Moisten your palms and fingers with a mixture of four parts water and one part rice vinegar. Make sure your hands aren’t dripping wet so the nori stays dry.

4. Spread and gently press a little less than 1 cup of sushi rice evenly over the entire piece of nori.

5. Lift the nori and turn it over so the rice touches the plastic wrap and the uncovered nori faces upward. Then lay the fillings across the nori about 1/3 of the distance from you.

6. Pull the top of the mat forward. The roll will follow the curve of the mat and roll over the edge of the nori. To make an inside-out roll, begin by preparing the fillings as you would for a sushi roll.

Special Inside-Out Rolls

Some ambitious sushi chefs make their inside-out sushi rolls extra special by adding additional ingredients such as avocado, mango, or slices of fish to the outside of the roll. To add extra ingredients to the outside of a roll, complete a roll following the steps above, but don’t cut the roll right away. Instead:

8. Pull the top of the mat forward. The roll will follow the curve of the mat and roll over the edge of the nori that wasn’t covered by rice.

9. If the nori doesn’t stick to itself after you’ve finished rolling, let the roll rest for a few minutes on its seam. Moisture from the rice should cause the nori to stick.

10. Cut the roll using a sashimi-bocho or any other sharp knife. First cut the roll into two halves, then halve those into four pieces, and finally, halve the remaining pieces into eight pieces.

How to Make Hand Rolls (Temaki)

Hand rolls, or temaki, are made by rolling rice and ingredients into a cone of nori. Any fillings you’d put into a sushi roll or inside-out roll can also be made into a hand roll. Hand rolls should be eaten shortly after they’re made, as moisture in the rice and fillings will quickly make the nori soften and break.

Preparing the Fillings

You should prepare fillings for hand rolls just as you would for sushi rolls. Make sure to cut the fish and vegetables into uniformly short and thin strips.

Making Hand Rolls Step-by-Step

1. Place a 4” × 7” piece of nori in the palm of your hand with its shiny side down and the 7” side perpendicular to your wrist.

2. Moisten your palms and fingers with a mixture of four parts water and one part rice vinegar. Make sure your hands aren’t dripping wet so the nori stays as dry as possible.

3. Place 1/4 cup of rice on the nori over your palm.

4. Place the fillings in the center of the rice.

5. Fold the bottom left corner of the nori over the fillings. Hold it in place with your thumb.

6. To roll and cut the inside-out roll, follow steps 6–10 in How to Make Sushi Rolls.

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