

Young and JA

The Takoyaki Experience

By Valerie Chun
The North American Post



Photo by Rie Kanai / The North American Post

Stovetop pans make takoyaki more accessible.

Takoyaki, one of my favorite Japanese foods, seems to be gaining popularity. In the past, it seemed nearly impossible to find outside of Japan, however, with the increasing number of Japanese restaurants and *izakayas* in the Puget Sound area, it can be found at many locations. Also, most recently it was sold at Bellevue College's annual Aki Matsuri.

Traditionally known as a delicacy from Osaka, there are an endless number of restaurants and small stands devoted solely to their making throughout the city and Japan.

Perhaps some of the appeal in takoyaki is in the making, which is like a show in itself. There is some sort of fascination in watching the takoyaki masters create perfectly cooked balls by the flick of their wrists.

Recently, while having dinner and gushing about our favorite Japanese foods, the interns here at *The North American Post* decided to have a takoyaki party. However, it turns out that making takoyaki is much harder than it looks. The vendors in Osaka's Dotonbori make it look so simple, but there is definitely some technique to it. The outside has to be perfectly cooked, not too soft and browned just perfectly, otherwise the half sphere will not rotate easily in the pan.

With a small pan over the stove, we were able to make 14 takoyaki at a time. After several rounds of making takoyaki, it seemed like our technique was only getting worse as the last batch came out

almost completely black.

Takoyaki are traditionally made of few ingredients: batter, *tako*, green onions, and *tenkasu* (small dried shrimp). They are then topped with *aonori*, bonito flakes, and sauce or *shoyu*. In recent years, though, the ingredients are becoming as wide-ranging as those of *okonomiyaki*. Cabbage, cheese, and *mochi* are only a few of the newly popular ingredients. People now often top them with mayonnaise, *ponzu*, and salt. As with other Japanese foods as well, the ingredients vary from Osaka's traditional takoyaki by region.

Takoyaki pans can be purchased at stores like Uwajimaya and online for a reasonable price. Having a takoyaki pan at home allows people to have their own experience of making takoyaki and also to experiment with their favorite ingredients. There are also machines now available that supposedly make the perfect takoyaki every time, with no actual turning necessary; it rotates the tako-filled balls automatically.

For those who do not have their own takoyaki pan, they can be bought frozen to be prepared at home or found on the menu at many local Japanese izakayas.

In making your own takoyaki, it is the experience that makes them delicious; learning how to make the perfectly shaped balls that are slightly crispy on the outside but soft and doughy on the inside. You will likely have a new found appreciation for takoyaki every time you eat it.

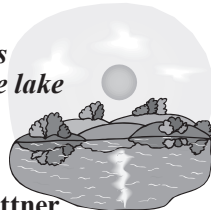
NORTH AMERICAN HAIKU

#10 Haiku in Autumn

By Carmen Sterba
For The North American Post

Think of some words that remind you of autumn: Here's some of mine: deer, acorns, maples and crickets.. Write down some words that come to your mind and you may be able to use them in a haiku. Here's some haiku that incorporate my word choices above:

*sunlit showers
the path to the lake
deer-warm*



Marjorie Buettner

In Japanese aesthetics, what is left out is often as important as what is shown in poetry or art. Instead of describing a deer on the path, Marjorie dreams up the expression "deer-warm" from the musky smell and warmth of the deer that preceded her on the path.

*chess in the park . . .
an acorn
topples a king*

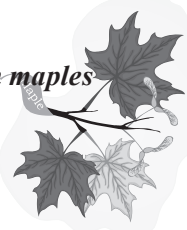


Curtis Dunlap,
The Heron's Nest Volume XI,
Number 2: June 2009

Everyone thinks of falling leaves in autumn, but how about chestnuts or acorns?

All is right with the world when an acorn topples a chess king, if it's not your chess king.

*an amber glow
through crimson maples
evensong*



Carmen Sterba,
Modern Haiku 36:1, 2005

For those who want to write a haiku on colored leaves, be a bit more specific by using colors and specific species like oak or Japanese maple. Using your senses, think of the sounds, sights, smells, tastes or what you touch in autumn. Also, think of movement and reverberation.

*the solace
of crickets at night
no way to say thanks*



Carmen Sterba,
Frogpond XXV:1

"Record heat" Modern Haiku 40:2, 2009 and "lapping shore water" frogpond 33:2, 2010.

[Editor's Note]

Carmen Sterba is a college instructor who was born in Seattle, WA and lived in Japan for half of her life. She has degrees in Far East Asian Studies and Literature. As Secretary of The Haiku Society of America from 2005-06 and the 1st Vice President in 2009, she remains an active award-winning haiku poet involved in American and international haiku circles.

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