

What is Wasabi?

The wasabi plant (*Eutrema wasabi*) is a member of the cruciferous family. It traditionally grows in very cold, flowing water from natural springs or rivers in deep valleys, under the canopy of trees. The earliest cultivation of wasabi dates at least to the 10th century. The grated ‘rhizome’ or above ground root-like stem of this plant has a fiery hot flavor that quickly dissipates in the mouth to leave a lingering sweet taste, with no burning sensation. Wasabi is a staple condiment in Japanese cuisine, served with sushi or noodles. The leaves can be dried and used for flavor in foods such as salad dressing, cheese, and crackers; or pickled fresh in sake brine or soy sauce.

Selecting Wasabi

Wasabi powders and pastes available in most US grocery stores and sushi restaurants are not real wasabi at all, or contain lower quality wasabi stems. Common ingredients include horseradish powder (dried and ground regular horseradish), mustard powder, cornstarch, and artificial coloring. Because wasabi plants are peculiar and particular in their needs, real wasabi is more expensive than horseradish and is considered a rare delicacy.

When selecting fresh wasabi for grating, choose fresh, cool, unshriveled roots. When selecting fresh leaves of the wasabi plant use the same guidelines you would use for selecting salad greens; no soggy or wilt, uniform color, etc.

Preparation

Wasabi adds a unique flavor and zing to foods, served as a spice or an herb in a dish, or as a condiment on the side.

The root is first peeled with a knife. The flavor of wasabi is released when it is finely ground into a thick green paste. Traditional Japanese chefs achieved this by rubbing the root on a sharkskin, but you can accomplish it using a circular motion on the backside of a metal grater where the spikes are small. Pile the grated wasabi into a ball and let stand at room temperature for five to ten minutes to allow the flavor and heat to develop. The flavor will dissipate after four hours or so.

- Serve with soy sauce to accompany sushi or sashimi (raw fish dishes).
- Add to noodle soups.
- Use as a condiment for grilled meats and vegetables.
- Add wasabi to salad dressings, marinades, and dips.
- Toss with roasted vegetables.

Storage

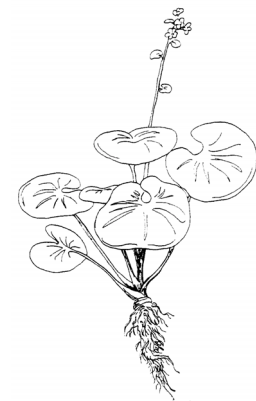
Wrap wasabi roots in damp towels and refrigerate when not being used. Rinse them in cold water every few days and trim when necessary to remove spoiled spots. The shelf life of refrigerated wasabi roots is approximately 30 days. Wasabi leaves should be stored in the refrigerator and used as soon as possible.

How Nutritious Is Wasabi?

As a member of the cruciferous family, wasabi contains the same cancer-fighting isothiocyanates as its cabbage cousins. The National Cancer Institute and the American Cancer Society have studied cruciferous vegetables extensively for years. They recommend that everyone eat several servings from this vegetable family each week to dramatically lower risk of all types of cancer. Researchers believe that one way the substances in cruciferous vegetables help prevent cancer is by helping the body eliminate excess hormones such as estrogen, thus reducing the risk of hormone-related cancers such as breast and prostate cancer.

Wasabi contains a considerable amount of potassium and fair amounts of calcium and vitamin C.¹ However, since it is typically used as a condiment in small amounts, wasabi does not qualify as a significant source of these nutrients.

Medicinal uses for wasabi have been documented since the 10th century. Some of its chemical components may kill microbes, thus perhaps leading to its usage with raw fish dishes.



¹ Fourth Revised Standard Tables of Food Composition in Japan.

Enjoying Wasabi

Oysters On The Half Shell With Wasabi Citrus Splash

Sweet and tart bits of citrus with the kick of fresh wasabi are a terrific contrast to briny oysters.

Citrus Splash:

1 pink grapefruit 1 small shallot, minced
1 tangerine 1 tablespoon minced chives
2 tablespoons fresh wasabi, peeled
and very finely minced
1 tablespoon rice vinegar
1/4 teaspoon red chili flakes

Peel grapefruit and tangerine and remove all white pulp. Section the citrus and with a sharp knife, peel and finely chop the sections over a bowl to catch the juices. Add chopped fruit to the bowl and add remaining ingredients. Refrigerate for at least 2 hours or up to 2 days before serving. *Makes 1 cup Splash – enough to top about 3 – 4 dozen oysters*

Fresh oysters in the shell

Wash oysters and scrub shells with a vegetable brush to remove any debris. Refrigerate till ready to shuck. Right before serving: shuck oysters, discarding top shells, inspecting oysters for any bits of broken shell, picking them out carefully.

Serve on a platter strewn with pine or spruce boughs and crushed ice. Serve splash in a decorated bowl so guests can spoon it over just-shucked oysters.

Recipe copyright 2000 by Kathy Casey Food Studios

Recipe Cards

Additional recipes for local crops, some developed by local chefs, are available. Contact the WSU Research and Extension office listed on the back panel.

Food from the Field

Local farmers are providing new foods for your table. Wasabi has caught the attention of Puget Sound farmers because its growing preferences make it a natural in this region. Fresh wasabi is a delicacy to Japan and now to the Pacific Northwest as well.

Buying local produce not only gives you fresh, nutritious food, but also enhances your community in these ways:

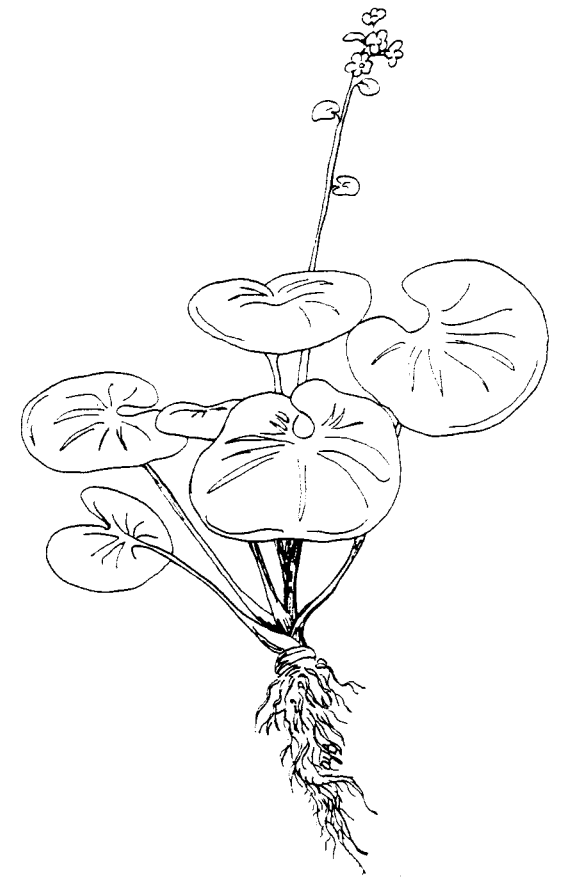
- Keeps small farmers in business and supports the local economy.
- Preserves farmland and open space in your area.
- Conserves natural resources—less fuel used in transportation and packaging.
- Preserves the environment with responsible use of water, fewer farm chemicals, and less air pollution.

If these things are important to you, visit a farmers' market weekly during the growing season and look for the Puget Sound Fresh label at your grocery store. Make a difference with your food dollars!

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Wasabi

A fiery delicacy from Japan served with noodles, sushi, dips, meats and other favorite foods.

Food from the Field Series