

Mindfulness in the city: Cabbage rolls for comfort



Many cultures have their own version of cabbage rolls

Caroline Ishii
Columnist

For many Canadians, cabbage rolls bring back memories of holiday meals and comfort food, especially in the colder months. Cabbage rolls are common to the cuisines of Central, Northern, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. When immigrants came from these countries to Canada, they brought many delicious recipes, including their version of cabbage rolls. But much of Western Asia, Northern China, and parts of North Africa have their own take on cabbage rolls, making it a truly multicultural dish. As a result, it's been difficult to confirm the origin of the cabbage rolls, and multiple groups of people may have invented it at the same time some 2,000 years ago. While living in Japan, I was



Caroline making cabbage rolls with friend Akiko as part of a Japanese-themed pop-up dinner in Ottawa.

surprised that cabbage rolls are also a popular comfort food in the winter. According to *Just One Cookbook*, a Japanese recipe website, Japanese households have enjoyed cabbage rolls since 1895, when the women's magazine, *Jokan*, introduced a recipe for cabbage rolls using

western green cabbage leaves. It soon became a staple of households as a western-style dish or *yoshoku*. Western produce, such as celery, carrots, tomatoes, and green



PHOTO CREDIT: CAROLINE ISHII

"Cabbage rolls provide comfort to people worldwide, and sharing them with family and friends brings us closer together."

cabbage, was first grown in Japan for Western visitors in or near port towns in the 1850s, such as Yokohama, which opened to foreign ships in 1859. And today, green cabbage is Japan's third most-consumed vegetable, according to Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare

(2017), following *daikon* radish and onions. **What about napa?** Originating in China, *napa* cabbage, called *hakusai* in Japanese, has been an essential ingredient in Japanese cuisine since the 15th century. In Japan, when I referred to *hakusai* as *napa*, as I do in Canada, it often resulted in confused looks because "*napa*" is the Japanese term for leaf or leaves. My aunts Helen and Betty in Toronto loved cabbage rolls and used to prepare their version of cabbage rolls, placed among the Japanese dishes at family gatherings. I thought this slightly odd at the time, but now understanding the history of cabbage rolls in Japan, this makes sense. Also, the dish combined their love of gardening, using fresh cabbage and tomatoes from their gardens, with their love of cooking and sharing food with others. And this always made sense. In the spirit of the holidays, I'm sharing my vegan version of cabbage rolls from *The Accidental Chef*. The recipe uses tempeh, made from fermented soybeans formed into a block. Tempeh differs from tofu, which is made from soymilk that is curdled and pressed. Tempeh originated in Indonesia and is used in many dishes

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A satsuma Christmas carol



PHOTO CREDIT: LILLIAN MICHIKO BLAKEY

An illustration of a satsuma mandarin crate by Lillian Michiko Blakey.

The sweet fragrance of a satsuma mandarin recall memories of another life in Japan

Lillian Michiko Blakey
Contributor

A satsuma mandarin in the toe of my Christmas stocking, so real I can smell it. I don't remember the other little gifts wrapped in tissue paper that Santa left for

me. I remember only the satsuma mandarin. Long after my sister and I, in our teens, had stopped believing in Santa, we still hung our stockings on Christmas Eve. How greedy we were then, hanging long stockings instead of socks! We knew Santa Mom would al-

ways make sure the stockings were filled to the top so that we wouldn't be disappointed. It was a game to keep the myth of Santa Claus alive—my sister and I because we didn't want to grow up, Mom because she didn't want us to grow up. Year after year, the mandarin in the toe was a constant. Satsuma mandarins are different from other oranges, originating in Japan more than 700

years ago. They are a lighter orange, sweet, juicy, and seedless. They are also the easiest variety to peel. The most tender, easily damaged type of mandarin, satsuma mandarins were harder to find fresh in stores. That's what made them special. In the 1950s, when my family left the sugar beet fields of Alberta to come to Toronto for a better life, there was only one Japanese food store. Dundas Union, in Toronto Chinatown, which carried satsuma mandarins, only at this time of the year, especially for the Japanese New Year. Mr. Maruno, the store owner, delivered Japanese food to any family who requested the service. Long gone now! So why did Mom carry on the satsuma tradition until we were almost adults? Decades later, she told me about her mother, Maki Teramoto, who had come to Canada as a picture bride to marry a man she had never met. My grandmother's family had grown satsuma mandarins in Kumamoto, Japan, so they were well off. Although Grandmother was the eldest child, she could never inherit the family fortune because she was a woman. Her brother inherited everything. So she decided to seek her fortune here. I think Mom wanted me to remember where my roots were, long ago in Japan, in the fragrant family orange grove. When we came to Toronto, both of my parents found work in Saul Kadonaga's Danforth Cleaners, a dry cleaning chain of 30 stores. He gave jobs to any Japanese Canadians who came East.

We rented two rooms behind the store where Mom worked—a large kitchen and one bedroom, with two beds squeezed in together. Her salary of \$30 per week covered the cost of the rent and groceries. We lived in the two rooms behind the Bloor Street store for ten years. We were poor, but my sister and I didn't know it. Like many of the children who lived above the stores on Bloor Street, who didn't know that they too, were poor. The Christmases in that tiny space were our happiest, much more than the countless elaborate ones later in my adult life. We felt rich because my father's Japanese American relatives—who did not lose their home or business during the Second World War—sent us a myriad of gifts every year. We piled the gifts high on Mom's Singer sewing machine, which she had ordered from the Eaton's catalogue in Alberta and brought to Ontario. We received over a hundred Christmas cards which Dad hung on strings crisscrossing the kitchen over our heads. Our friends in the neighbourhood were wide-eyed with envy when they saw the huge piles, year after year. On Christmas mornings, before Mom and Dad were awake, the only thing we were allowed to open were the stockings. Feeling the crinkly tissue paper through the stocking was our secret pleasure, transporting us to magic

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there. With a high protein content and many vitamins and minerals, it's usually found in the freezer or refrigerated section of natural food or grocery stores and can be used like ground meat. However, because of its slightly bitter taste, it is best baked in a sauce before use or combined in strong-flavoured dishes.

You can replace the tempeh in the recipe with other plant-based products like veggie ground round, a popular ready-to-use product for your dishes found in the refrigerated section of most supermarkets. However, it is often not gluten-free, containing wheat and other ingredients.

Cabbage rolls provide comfort to people worldwide, and sharing them with family and friends brings us closer together, contributing to joy and world peace.

Wishing you a holiday season and a new year filled with delicious taste memories!

With love and gratitude to *Nikkei Voice* for continuing to invite me to contribute articles, and to you, the reader, for following me on my journey.

—Caroline

Cabbage Rolls
(vegan and gluten-free)

Yield: About eighteen rolls.

Tomato Sauce:

- 2 cans (28 oz) crushed tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons unrefined sugar
- ½ cup red wine
- Sea salt and freshly ground pepper

Cabbage Rolls:

- 1 large head cabbage or 2 medium heads cabbage
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 cups onion, finely diced (about 2 medium onions)
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon chili flakes (more for more heat)
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- 1 pack of tempeh (24-ounce), coarsely grated
- 1½ cups carrots, coarsely grated
- 1½ cups short-grain brown rice
- 1 tablespoon gluten-free tamari or soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon maple syrup

To make the tomato sauce:

Put the tomatoes and red wine in a pot over medium heat. Bring to a boil and then simmer for twenty minutes.

Near the end, add the vinegar and sugar and simmer, stirring for a few minutes. Remove from heat and set aside.

To make the filling:

Heat oil in a saucepan over medium-high heat. Add the onions and cook until caramelized, about 20 minutes.

Add the garlic and spices and stir for a few minutes. Stir in the tempeh and cook for a few minutes. Then, add the carrots and rice.

To prepare the cabbage rolls:

First, core the cabbage with a sharp paring knife. Bring to boil a large pot with water. Carefully



PHOTO CREDIT: CAROLINE ISHII

Chef Caroline Ishii's vegan and gluten free cabbage rolls from her book, *The Accidental Chef: Lessons Learned in and out of the Kitchen.*

place the cored cabbage in hot water.

Using tongs, gently transfer the outer leaves of the cabbage to a colander as they blanch and come off easily when ready.

Rinse the leaves with cold water. Lay on towels to dry. Then lay the cabbage leaves, rib side down, on a flat surface. Run a rolling pin over them to crush the spine.

Spoon about ¼ cup or more of the filling onto each leaf, just above the stem. Fold the end and sides over the filling and roll up. Repeat with the remaining ingredients.

Place the finished rolls, seam

side down, in a baking dish with a layer of sauce and cabbage leaves (use leaves that don't work for rolling) at the bottom.

Pour the remaining tomato sauce over the rolls, ideally halfway up the side, and cover tightly with aluminum foil.

Bake in a 350 F oven for about one and a half hours until the leaves have softened. Remove from the oven and let sit for 15 minutes before serving.

Serve the cabbage rolls with sour cream on top or the side. It tastes even better the next day and when shared with others!

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Pacific.

"This powerful public history project has changed the national conversation about what happened to Japanese Canadians in the mid-20th century and why it matters today," states Alexandra D'Arcy, Humanities Associate Dean of Research at Uvic.

"By choosing connection and cooperation, the research and resources developed by the Landscapes of Injustice team—and now those from Past Wrongs, Future Choices—will have a profound impact for generations to come."

The Landscapes of Injustice initiative has garnered several prestigious awards over the years, including the Canadian Race Relation Foundation's 2018 Award of Excellence, BC Heritage's 2021 Outstanding Award for Excellence in Education, Communication and Awareness, and UVic's 2022 Reach Award for Excellence in Knowledge Mobilization.

Their capstone exhibition, *Broken Promises*, was shortlisted for a 2021 Governor General's award and received an Award of Excellence from the British Columbia Museums Association. The SSHRC Connections Impact Award was a wonderful note to end.

Written by Michael Abe with files by Philip Cox.

To learn more about Landscapes of Injustice visit, www.landscapesofinjustice.com.

—日系文化会館・JCCC—

New Year's Festival 2023

ふれてみよう日本のお正月

令和5年1月22日(日)
Sun. Jan. 22
11:30am - 3:00pm

Shishimai (Lion Dance) 獅子舞

Traditional Mochi Making お餅つき

Taiko Drumming 太鼓

New Year's Calligraphy 書初め

Matcha Tea お茶席

Fun Kids' Activities 子供ゲーム・遊びコーナー

Entertainment 各種エンターテイメント

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