

SECRETSOFJAPANESE

FIRST EDITION · OCTOBER 2026

FREE SAMPLE · FROM SECRETS OF THE JAPANESE KITCHEN

3

Day Fridge Reset

A free sample from Secrets of the Japanese Kitchen



5 SECRETS · 2 PRINTABLES · EVERY CLAIM SOURCED

The 3-Day Fridge Reset

A free sample from Secrets of the Japanese Kitchen



SECRETSOFJAPANESE

Living secrets of Japanese people

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Read this first. This book shares household practices and general information from the sources listed in the back. It is not medical, legal or professional advice. Follow product labels, test cleaning methods on a hidden area first, never mix cleaning products, and ask your doctor or pharmacist about anything that concerns your health or your medicines.

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How to use this book

Many Japanese kitchens are small: a compact fridge, a short counter, rarely a walk-in pantry. Yet the habits that grew up around that small kitchen are some of the best food-saving habits anywhere: buy the portion you will eat, read the date properly, give every food the storage it actually needs, and turn the last of one meal into the start of the next.

This book collects those habits and adapts them to an ordinary American kitchen. Every entry follows the same pattern. **The practice** is what a Japanese household does. **Why it works** is the reason, in plain words. **Tonight** is the small first step, usually free. Where a habit touches food safety, a **Care** note gives the official US guidance, because a habit is only worth keeping if it is safe.

Entries marked *The system* are not Japanese customs. They are the household routines that make a Japanese habit work in an American home. Every factual claim is sourced in the back of the book, with a link you can check yourself.

Twenty simple recipes at the back turn the habits into dinner. Start with one habit, the one that made you think of something in your fridge right now. Then add another next week.

PART 1

Shop for the next three days



The waste in most kitchens is decided at the store, days before anything spoils. These habits move the decision back to where it belongs.

01 Buy fresh food for three days, everything else for the week

買い物

Buy fresh food for three days, everything else for the week

THE PRACTICE

Japanese supermarkets sell fresh vegetables in meal-sized pieces: half a cabbage wrapped in film, a quarter of a daikon radish, a short length of leek, one fish fillet to a tray. The shopping is built around the next few dinners, not the whole week ahead.

WHY IT WORKS

Your fridge slows food down; it does not stop it. Leafy greens keep losing water and crunch every day, whatever the dial says. A bag of greens that was perfect on Monday is often past its best by the weekend, and the big bag only saves money if every leaf is eaten in time.

TONIGHT

- ☐ Split your shopping list into two columns: **Week** and **Three days**.
- ☐ Canned, frozen and dry foods go in Week. Fresh produce, fish, tofu and anything soft go in Three days.
- ☐ On your main shop, buy the Week column in full and only three days of the other.
- ☐ Top up fresh food mid-week, on the way home from something you were doing anyway.

2 sources for this secret · page 16

PART 2

Read the date like a Japanese shopper



Japan prints two different kinds of date, and shoppers grow up knowing which is which. Once you know the difference, you stop throwing away food that was never unsafe.

02 Learn the two dates: shōmi kigen and shōhi kigen

03 Keep perishables to the clock, strictly

Learn the two dates: **shōmi kigen** and **shōhi kigen**

賞味期限・消費期限 *shōmi kigen*・*shōhi kigen*・best-before・use-by

THE PRACTICE

Japanese food carries one of two dates. **Shōmi kigen** is the date a food *tastes its best* by. It appears on foods that keep well: crackers, instant noodles, canned goods, bottled sauces. **Shōhi kigen** is the date a food is *safe to eat* by. It appears on foods that spoil quickly: bento boxes, fresh noodles, raw meat, ready meals.

WHY IT WORKS

One date is about quality, the other about safety, and Japanese shoppers treat them differently. A quality date past its day is a reason to look and smell. A safety date past its day is never argued with.

TONIGHT

- ☐ When you put food away tonight, ask of each date: is this a quality date or a safety date?
- ☐ Write Q or S on the lid with a marker if it helps the rest of the household.

2 sources for this secret・page 16

Keep perishables to the clock, strictly

THE PRACTICE

The other half of the Japanese system is just as important: food that spoils fast is kept to its safety date, every time.

WHY IT WORKS

The look-and-smell check works for crackers. It does not work for raw chicken, because the bacteria that make people ill do not always change how food looks or smells.

TONIGHT

- ☐ Raw ground meat and raw poultry: cook or freeze within **1 to 2 days**.
- ☐ Raw fish: within **1 to 3 days**. Steaks and chops: **3 to 5 days**.
- ☐ Cooked leftovers: **3 to 4 days** in the fridge.
- ☐ When in doubt, use the **Cold Storage Chart** at the back of this book.

1 source for this secret · page 16

PART 3

Set up the fridge



A Japanese fridge is organised around what each food needs: cold and dry for rice, cold and wet for tofu, cold for opened sauces. These habits give your fridge the same jobs.

04 Run the fridge at 40 °F and the freezer at 0 °F

05 Keep opened rice in a bottle in the vegetable drawer

冷蔵庫

Run the fridge at 40 °F and the freezer at 0 °F

THE SYSTEM

Cold is the whole point of a fridge, and the dial on the wall is not a thermometer. A cheap appliance thermometer on the middle shelf tells you what your food is really sitting in.

WHY IT WORKS

US food-safety guidance is built on a fridge at 40 °F (4 °C) or below and a freezer at 0 °F (−18 °C) or below. Every storage time in this book assumes those temperatures.

TONIGHT

- ☐ Put a fridge thermometer on the middle shelf tonight and read it tomorrow morning.
- ☐ Adjust the dial one step at a time and check again the next day.

2 sources for this secret · page 16

Keep opened rice in a bottle in the vegetable drawer

THE PRACTICE

Japan's Ministry of Agriculture recommends keeping polished rice cool. Its easiest suggestion is to pour the rice into a clean, completely dry plastic bottle, screw the cap on, and lay it in the vegetable drawer.

WHY IT WORKS

Every grain of rice carries a little oil in its outer layer, and that oil goes stale faster in a warm room, especially in a cupboard beside the stove. Cold, dry storage slows that down. The ministry treats about a month after polishing as a guide for how long rice tastes its best.

TONIGHT

- ☐ Wash a 2-litre drink bottle and let it dry **completely**, for a full day.
- ☐ Fill it with rice through a paper funnel, cap it, and lay it in the vegetable drawer.
- ☐ Keep the rest of the bag in the coolest, driest cupboard you have, away from the stove.

CARE

The bottle must be bone dry before rice goes in; damp rice can grow mould.

2 sources for this secret · page 16

Cold Storage Chart

From FoodSafety.gov (US Government). Fridge at 40 °F (4 °C) or below; freezer at 0 °F (−18 °C) or below. Freezer times are for quality only: food kept continuously at 0 °F stays safe indefinitely.

FOOD	FRIDGE	FREEZER
Ground meat and ground poultry	1–2 days	3–4 months
Chicken or turkey, pieces	1–2 days	9 months
Chicken or turkey, whole	1–2 days	1 year
Steaks, chops, roasts	3–5 days	4–12 months
Raw sausage	1–2 days	1–2 months
Bacon	1 week	1 month
Fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, tuna)	1–3 days	2–3 months
Lean fish (cod, flounder)	1–3 days	6–8 months
Shrimp	3–5 days	6–18 months
Raw eggs in shell	3–5 weeks	Do not freeze in shell
Hard-cooked eggs	1 week	Do not freeze
Deli meat, opened or sliced	3–5 days	1–2 months
Hot dogs, opened	1 week	1–2 months
Egg, chicken, tuna or macaroni salad	3–4 days	Does not freeze well
Soups and stews	3–4 days	2–3 months
Cooked meat or poultry leftovers	3–4 days	2–6 months
Pizza	3–4 days	1–2 months

The Three-Day List

Write what must be eaten in the next three days. Plan dinner from the top.

FOOD	EAT BY	PLAN
		☐ pot ☐ pickle ☐ bento ☐ freeze
		☐ pot ☐ pickle ☐ bento ☐ freeze
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		☐ pot ☐ pickle ☐ bento ☐ freeze

PRINTABLE

The Split Shopping List

Week on the left, three days on the right.

WEEK • CANNED, FROZEN, DRY

THREE DAYS · FRESH

Every claim, checked

Links were checked in October 2026. Some government sites block automated checks but open normally in a browser.

Secret 01 • Buy fresh food for three days, everything else for the week

- USDA FAS, Japanese Fresh-Cut Vegetable Market
https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/DownloadReportByFileName?fileName=Japanese+Fresh-Cut+Vegetable+Market--Recent+Changes+and+Implications_Osaka+ATO_Japan_10-8-2014.pdf
- USDA FSIS, Refrigeration and Food Safety
<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/refrigeration>

Secret 02 • Learn the two dates: shōmi kigen and shōhi kigen

- Consumer Affairs Agency of Japan, date labelling
https://www.caa.go.jp/policies/policy/consumer_policy/information/food_loss/conference/pdf/adjustments_index_10_161012_0011.pdf
- Tokyo Metropolitan Government, food labelling FAQ
https://www.hokeniryo.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/anzen/anzen/food_faq/hyoji/hyoji04

Secret 03 • Keep perishables to the clock, strictly

- FoodSafety.gov, Cold Food Storage Chart
<https://www.foodsafety.gov/food-safety-charts/cold-food-storage-charts>

Secret 04 • Run the fridge at 40 °F and the freezer at 0 °F

- FoodSafety.gov, Cold Food Storage Chart
<https://www.foodsafety.gov/food-safety-charts/cold-food-storage-charts>
- USDA FSIS, Refrigeration and Food Safety
<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/refrigeration>

Secret 05 • Keep opened rice in a bottle in the vegetable drawer

- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), rice storage
https://www.maff.go.jp/j/heyakodomo_sodan/0006/01.html
- Panasonic, rice storage
<https://panasonic.jp/life/food/110019.html>

Why every secret has a source

Japanese household habits are easy to romanticise and easy to exaggerate. This book does neither. Each practice is described the way a reliable source describes it, the reasons are the reasons the sources give, and where a habit touches safety we give the official US guidance alongside it.

If you find a link that no longer works or a line you think is wrong, write to us through secretsofjapanese.vercel.app. We correct the book and send every buyer the updated edition.



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