



Sanae Inada was born in Kobe, Japan where she learnt to appreciate the use of fresh seasonal ingredients to prepare simple and tasty meals. An avid home cook and baker, she is trained in macrobiotics and believes that we can achieve optimum physical and emotional wellness through a well-balanced diet that is high in fibre and low in fat. Sanae's training is evident in this cookbook where she introduces a wide variety of recipes that are delicious as well as nutritious.



As one of Japan's favourite comfort foods, onigiri or rice balls are quick and easy to put together, nutritious, low in fat and, most importantly, delicious. This cookbook shows you how easy it is to prepare onigiri for any occasion, whether it is for a meal or a tasty snack to pack in your lunchbox. Popular among adults and children alike, onigiri can be filled, mixed or wrapped with almost any ingredient and moulded into balls, triangles or any fun shape to suit your mood. With this collection of 50 recipes, discover the endless variety of onigiri you can create with just a few simple ingredients. Treat yourself to classic Japanese favourites such as *tarako* (salted cod roe) onigiri, *tenmusu* (shrimp fritter) and *umeboshi* (salted Japanese plum) onigiri, or fun creations such as *omurice* (Japanese omelette rice) onigiri, SPAM onigiri and chicken rice onigiri.

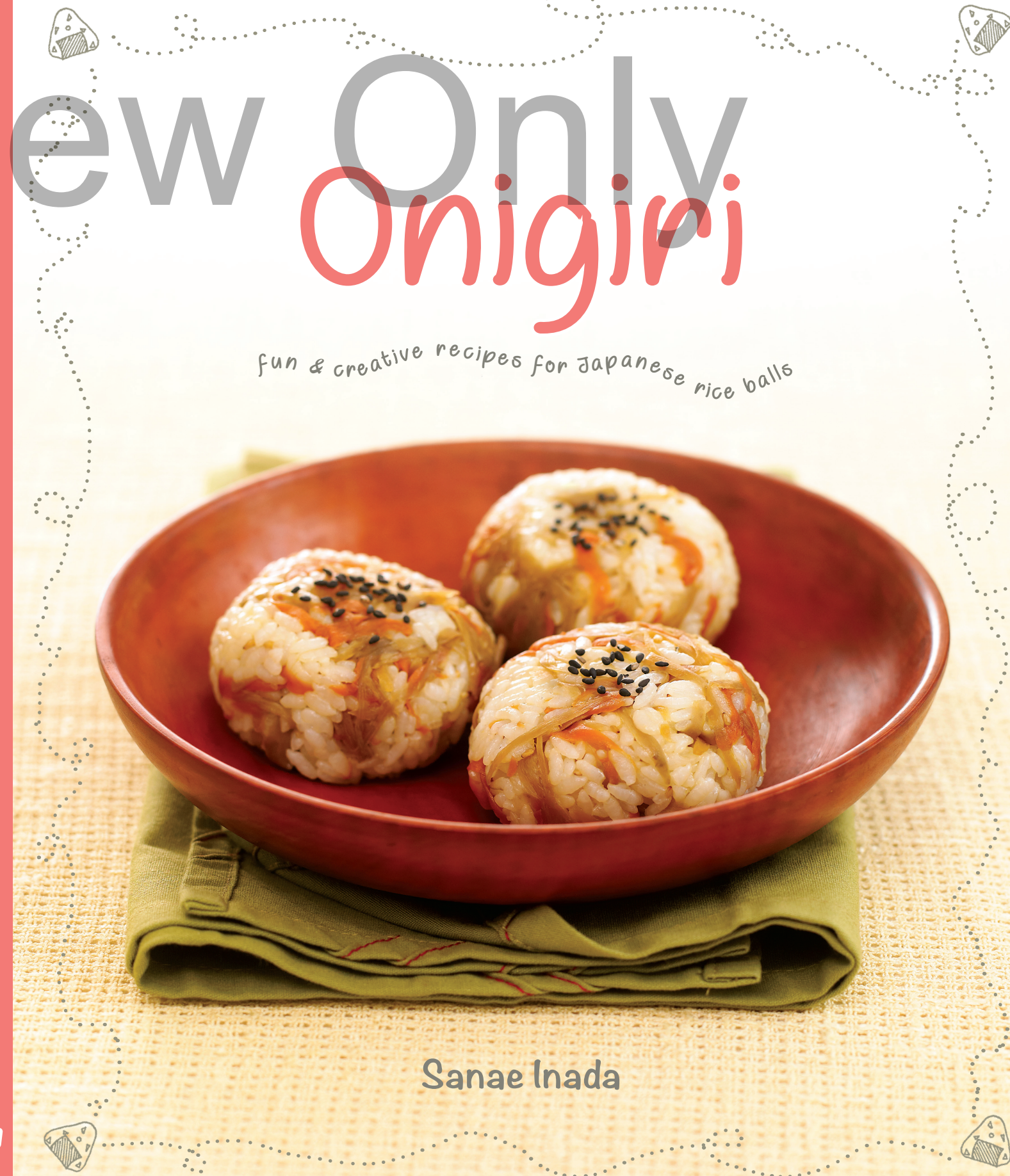
Sanae Inada

Onigiri fun & creative recipes for Japanese rice balls

Marshall Cavendish Cuisine

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Onigiri

fun & creative recipes for Japanese rice balls

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Onigiri
shows you how to create fun and delicious rice balls to enjoy anytime.

Includes a step-by-step guide to cooking perfect rice for making onigiri

Makes use of ingredients that are readily available

Features new and creative ideas for onigiri as well as traditional onigiri well-loved in Japan



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Onigiri

fun & creative recipes for Japanese rice balls



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To those who love Japanese food

All photos by Joshua Tan, Elements By The Box

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Introduction



Do you have a favourite food that is so simple to make but hard to find at restaurants?

Onigiri is one of those dishes. Onigiri is Japanese soul food. You can discover Japanese culture and seasons through the rice ball. Ingredients that go into it are often seasonal and some regions specialise in certain kinds of onigiri. For example, *tenmusu*, onigiri filled with tempura prawns, is a speciality of Nagoya city, while luncheon meat onigiri was very popular in Okinawa before becoming well-liked all over Japan.

I hope this book inspires you to create your own onigiri and step into a Japanese culinary journey. All the ingredients in the book are easily found at your local or Japanese supermarket. The recipes are very simple (even those made with many ingredients) yet you can enjoy authentic Japanese flavours at home. Feel free to adjust the amount of ingredients used to suit your taste. Every individual has his or her own preferences, so use the recipes in this cookbook as guides and suggestions. However, please keep in mind three basic points to make delicious onigiri:

- Use Japanese short grain rice
- Use natural sea salt
- Put in lots of love

Let's put on our aprons, roll up our sleeves and wash our hands!

Are you ready to make onigiri?

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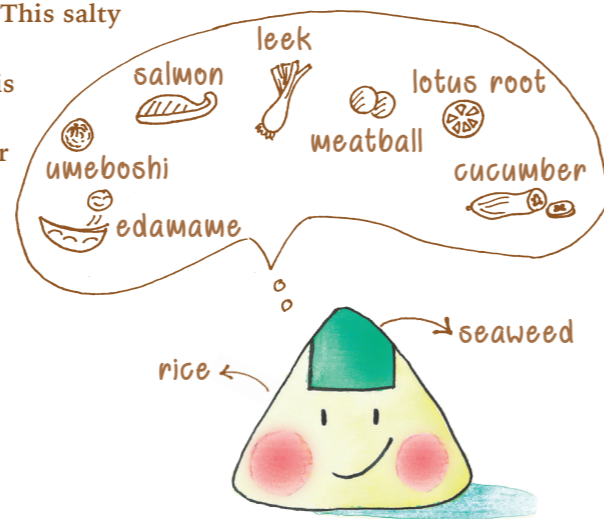
What is Onigiri?

Onigiri is a rice ball that comes in a variety of shapes and can be filled with different ingredients

You can eat them for breakfast, as a snack or even pack them into a bento box to bring along for picnics. In this sense, onigiri is the Japanese equivalent of a sandwich or Cornish pasty. Every Japanese has his or her favourite onigiri and each region in Japan has its own special version. My favourites are umeboshi and *tarako* (salted cod roe) onigiri my mother makes.

Onigiri has been part of Japan's culinary offering for centuries. The Japanese believe that the humble rice ball reflects the time and place where the person making the onigiri lives, his/her family and cooking philosophy, and that all these will be passed on to the person eating the onigiri.

Traditionally, onigiri is made with bare hands and the rice has to be very hot when you mould it into shape. Even when your hands become red from the heat, you cannot complain! It sounds funny but this is the key to making delicious onigiri. When you mould the rice, wet your hands and spread a pinch of salt evenly on your palms and fingers. When the hot rice is transferred to your hands, the water evaporates and forms a thin salty layer over the rice ball. This salty layer keeps moisture and air inside while preventing germs from multiplying. This is why you can carry onigiri around even during the hot summer months. This layer of salt also keeps the rice moist—even when it is cold, so you can still enjoy the great taste of the rice and the delicious fillings hours after making the onigiri.



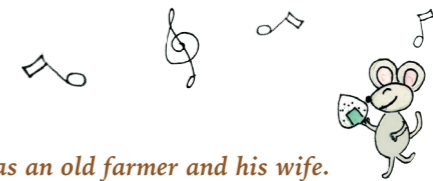
A Short History of Onigiri

The history of onigiri goes back to the Yayoi period dating between 300 BC and 300 AD.

We know this because a carbonised chunk of rice was found at an archaeological site. It was subsequently claimed as the oldest onigiri in Japan. Originally, glutinous rice (*mochi*) was used for onigiri but from the end of Kamakura period, between 1192 and 1333, Japanese short grain rice (*uruchi-mai*) was used. The custom of wrapping onigiri with seaweed started during the Edo period between 1603 and 1867.

Onigiri has a range of regional variations. In Japan, these rice balls are called by various names. Onigiri, from the word *nigiru* (which means 'to grab'), *omusubi* (which means 'to tie' or 'to knot') and *nigirimeshi* (which means 'to grab rice or food') are all names for the rice ball. In general, onigiri and *omusubi* are interchangeable and widely recognised in Japan and around the world. Onigiri also come in a variety of forms such as triangle, round, barrel and square shapes.

There are many old Japanese stories that feature onigiri. One of my favourite stories is called *Omusubi Kororin*. *Kororin* is an onomatopoeia of the rolling sound.



Once upon a time, there was an old farmer and his wife.

One day, the old farmer was cutting trees in the mountains as usual.

At lunchtime, he sat down on a tree stump to have the lunch that his wife prepared. When he opened the omusubi wrapped with bamboo leaf, one of the rice balls dropped and started rolling down the hill. The old farmer tried running after the rice ball but it fell into a very small hole. Just then, the old man heard a happy voice coming from the small hole. The voice was singing "Omusubi kororin sutton ton!" He was very surprised and dropped one more omusubi into the hole and again he heard, "Omusubi kororin sutton ton!" The farmer continued dropping one omusubi after another into the hole so he could continue hearing the happy song. Soon after, he too fell into the hole.

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Tarako Onigiri

Tarako is salted cod roe that can be eaten raw or cooked by grilling or boiling before consumption. Because it has a very short shelf life, eat it as soon as you buy it or store it in the freezer. Some people like well-cooked salted cod roe but I love eating it half-cooked. Besides eating it with onigiri, I love adding *tarako* to pasta or mixing it in mashed potato. The salty-sweet taste and texture of *tarako* is fun and delicious! This onigiri has been my favourite since I was little. When my mother makes this version, she adds a generous amount of roe. Because of this, I've never been happy with other salted cod roe onigiri as I always prefer my mother's!

Makes



Salted cod roe (*tarako*) 100 g
(3½ oz)

Cooked Japanese short grain
rice (see page 18) 480 g
(17 oz)

Salt 1 tsp

Nori seaweed sheets 4

1. Place salted cod roe on a sheet of aluminium foil and grill in a toaster oven for 2 minutes. Alternatively, boil a pot of water and cook salted cod roe for 1 minute. Divide salted cod roe into 4 portions.

2. Scoop one-quarter of the rice into a rice bowl. Make a 2-cm (1-in) indentation in the rice with your finger and add some salted cod roe.

3. To form onigiri, wet your hands and spread a pinch of salt on your palms and fingers. Transfer rice to your hands and gently press rice 2–3 times into your preferred shape. Make sure filling is completely covered with rice. Wrap nori around rice ball as desired. Repeat with the remaining ingredients.



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Makes

Cooked Japanese short grain rice (see page 18) 160 g (5²/₃ oz)

Nori seaweed sheets 4

Cabbage 1/8 head, shredded

Toasted white sesame seeds to sprinkle

Tonkatsu

Pork loin cutlet 100 g (3¹/₂ oz)

Plain (all-purpose) flour 4 Tbsp

Egg 1, medium, beaten

Breadcrumbs 5 Tbsp

Vegetable oil for deep-frying

Store-bought *tonkatsu* sauce 3 Tbsp

Tonkatsu Onigiri

This onigiri is substantial even though only a small amount of rice is used, making it suitable for a hearty lunch. If you have *tonkatsu* left over from a meal, you can use that and it will work just as well. Using store-bought *tonkatsu* sauce can save you some preparation time.

1. To prepare *tonkatsu*, pound the pork loin lightly and cut into 2 x 5-cm (1 x 2-in) sticks. Coat pork with flour, egg and breadcrumbs in this order.
2. Heat oil for deep-frying and cook the pork loin until golden brown. Remove and drain well with kitchen towels.
3. Coat pork loin in *tonkatsu* sauce and set aside.
4. To form onigiri, scoop 40 g (1¹/₄ oz) of rice on a sheet of nori and spread rice evenly.
5. Place a pinch of shredded cabbage in the centre of the rice and top with a piece of pork.
6. Roll nori and rice up into a cone. Garnish with some sesame seeds. Repeat with the remaining ingredients.



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Umeboshi Kimchi Onigiri

Umeboshi is a healthy alkaline food and one of the most distinctive Japanese ingredients. This recipe brings together two strong flavours—spicy and sour. The sourness of pickled plums combined with the spiciness of *kimchi* makes this a perfectly balanced onigiri.

1. Mince umeboshi with a knife to make a paste. Set aside.
2. Drain *kimchi* by squeezing it with your hands.
3. Mix umeboshi paste and *kimchi* in a small bowl.
4. Scoop one-quarter of the rice into a rice bowl. Make a 2-cm (1-in) indentation in the rice with your finger and add one-quarter of umeboshi-*kimchi* mixture.
5. Wet your hands and spread a pinch of salt on your palms and fingers. Transfer rice to your hands and gently press rice 2–3 times into your preferred shape. Pour sesame seeds on a flat dish and roll rice ball over to coat. Repeat with the remaining ingredients.

Note *Kimchi* is a fermented dish from Korea. It contains a large amount of fibre, vitamins, lactic acid and bacteria. Because it is a fermented food, keep *kimchi* in the refrigerator and make sure to open the container regularly to release built-up gases.

To make an open style onigiri as shown in the picture, mould the rice and roll in sesame seeds, then top with umeboshi-*kimchi* mixture.

Makes



Umeboshi 4, small, pitted
Store-bought *kimchi* 60 g
(2 oz), finely chopped
Cooked Japanese short grain
rice (see page 18) 480 g
(17 oz)
Salt 1 tsp
Toasted white sesame seeds
1 tsp



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Cooked Japanese short grain rice (see page 18) 400 g (14¹/₃ oz)

English mustard 1 tsp

Salt 1 tsp

Nori seaweed sheets 4

White radish (*daikon*) sprouts to garnish

Braised pork belly

Vegetable oil 2 Tbsp

Pork belly 200 g (7 oz), cut into bite-size pieces

Water 250 ml (8 fl oz / 1 cup)

Sugar 1 Tbsp

Japanese soy sauce (*shoyu*) 100 ml (3¹/₃ fl oz)

Sake 50 ml (1²/₃ fl oz)

Ginger 10-cm (5-in) knob, peeled and finely chopped

Braised Pork Belly Onigiri

Most Japanese families swear by their own version of *buta no kakuni* or braised pork belly—every household has its own special recipe. The key to a delicious dish is in the softness of the pork belly—the best braised pork belly should melt in your mouth.

1. Make braised pork belly. Heat oil in a pot and cook pork belly until slightly browned. Add water and bring to boil. Skim the surface with a slotted spoon to remove any impurities. Add sugar, soy sauce, sake and ginger. Lower heat and cook, covered, for 30 minutes. Remove from heat.

2. To form onigiri, scoop one-quarter of the rice into a bowl. Make a 2-cm (1-in) indentation in the rice with your finger and add 1–2 small pieces of pork belly. Spoon ¹/₄ tsp English mustard on top of pork belly.

3. Wet your hands and spread a pinch of salt on your palms and fingers. Transfer rice to your hands and gently press rice 2–3 times into your preferred shape. Make sure that the filling is completely covered with rice. Wrap nori around rice ball as desired and garnish with white radish sprouts. Repeat with the remaining ingredients.

Note To make braised pork belly more substantial for lunch and dinner, add a hard-boiled egg. Simply simmer a peeled hard-boiled egg in the braised pork belly sauce.

