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SPRING 2008

Umeboshi plums...

THE KING OF ALKALINISING FOODS by Louise Nowotarski

> IT'S BECOMING A DAILY RITUAL, my eating an umeboshi plum while sipping green tea in the morning – 'I think I'm turning Japanese'. I pull extraordinary faces as I suck on the sourest plum on the planet. And considering I'm a 'sweet' person rather than a 'sour', why would I put myself through this you ask.

I'm reminded of the British author and Japanese food authority, Robbie Swinnerton's words: "the abrupt, searingly tart, tangy, salty taste jolts the eyes open, shakes the stomach awake, sandpapers off any staleness from the taste buds and gets the day off to an unforgettable start." He compares umeboshi's taste to the culinary equivalent of a cold shower. And he's right.

So why do the Japanese venerate this pickled plum? More importantly why would we include this in our western diet? Let's start with its alkalinising effect on the body. Umeboshi plums have the highest known source of citric acid, 20 times that of a lemon. Ironically, their powerful acidity alkalinises an over acid system, combating fatigue, stimulating kidney and liver function and purifying the blood. Umeboshi is well known for its medicinal qualities since it works miracles on the digestive system and rids the body of toxins. How many people today suffer from reflux, heartburn, headache, belching, flatulence, diarrhea, constipation, and stomach ache etc ... indications that the digestive system is just not working properly and has become sluggish? Umeboshi is a tonic for stomach, liver, gallbladder and intestines.

Tiredness is a common complaint today. Umeboshi's citric acid converts lactic acid into water and carbon dioxide which can easily be discharged from the body, thus aiding athletes and those prone to muscle aches and pains. The citric acid increases metabolism and assists absorption of calcium in the intestines. Umeboshi plums have a high concentration of Vitamin C and strong anti-bacterial qualities. In Japan today, a housewife includes a plum in the lunchbox to prevent rice from spoiling. Added to soft rice, umeboshi is the Japanese cure all for sick children with sore tummies. In the West we say, 'an apple a day keeps the doctor away' but in the East, an umeboshi a day is regarded as the best preventative medicine available.

Umeboshi is in fact not actually a plum but from the apricot family. However, it is always referred to as umeboshi (literally, dried plum). Umeboshi plums are made by alternately soaking unripe Japanese 'ume' in brine, then sun-

drying and returning to the brine. The pink colour of the umeboshi is derived from red shiso leaves (perilla) which are pickled together with the plum. Red shiso is a mineral rich herb high in iron. It contains a natural preservative which is reported to have over one hundred times the strength of synthetic preservatives used in food. It too contributes to digestive health.

Umeboshi comes in two forms, puree and organically grown plums. The plums have the more medicinal benefits and are made in the traditional way. Ideal for anyone suffering from food intolerances or coeliac. The plum is gluten and allergen free and can add zest to a very restricted and bland diet as a seasoning.

Use puree on corn on the cob instead of the traditional butter and salt. Mix a teaspoon of puree with a teaspoon of miso in hot water and drink instead of tea or coffee. Use umeboshi vinegar in salad dressings or in place of salt in cooking.

Umeboshi combined with Kuzu and ginger is a widely recommended macrobiotic drink (recipe over). Taken in the morning on an empty stomach it can strengthen and aid a weak digestive system, ward off a cold or help with a hangover.

Umeboshi plums are indeed a miracle food so persist with that zesty taste and you'll feel so much better for it.



FOR MORE INFORMATION...

www.clearspring.co.uk/umeboshi
www.thefoodcoach.com.au

HONEY

> ALBERT EINSTEIN IS QUOTED as saying “if bees were to disappear, we would only have a few years to live.” Such is the valuable contribution of bees in pollinating our crops. But most of us don't think that deeply when we reach for the jar of honey – we're more concerned with the choices available – raw or heated, organic or conventional, dark or light, mild or strong.

So what is *raw honey* and what are the criteria for being *certified organic*? According to Brian of Ambrosia Apiaries, his raw certified organic honey has had no external heat applied to it at any stage. The honey is extracted from the hive and packaged in glass jars cold. Heat above the hive temperature kills the active health promoting enzymes. Raw honey contains all the naturally occurring enzymes and other co-factors such as traces of pollen and propolis. (Interestingly, it's the floral source of the honey that determines the rate of crystallisation. Some honeys stay liquid for years; whereas others like Red Gum crystallise rock hard quickly.)

In the future, AQUIS (Australian Quarantine Inspection Service) will set the standards nationwide for organic certification. They will license NASAA (National Association for Sustainable Agriculture) or ACO (Australian Certified

Organic) to enforce these standards. At the moment, the standards have been set by these regulatory authorities and they are (in part):

- 1 Sites have to be a minimum of 5km from urban areas, refuse tips and sites of possible contamination (i.e. intense agricultural land or sprayed orchards).
- 2 Hives have to be prepared using specified materials – no oil based paints are allowed. (Ambrosia Apiaries dip their boxes in boiling wax and don't paint them at all.)
- 3 Only stainless steel wire is used to hold the wax sheets in the frames.
- 4 The use of antibiotics for the treatment of American and European foulbrood is not allowed.
- 5 Queens are not allowed to have their wings clipped.
- 6 Temperatures in processing honey must not exceed 45 degrees C. – most important as higher temperatures destroy enzymes.
- 7 The feeding of sugar syrup is not allowed except in extreme circumstances.
- 8 Detailed records of all movements of hives, hive materials, amount and type of honey taken, queen replacements must be kept.



UME-SHO-KUZU

This is a strange drink but is a truly rejuvenating tonic taken first thing in the morning on an empty stomach for digestion or mid afternoon as a pick-me-up. Kuzu is wild Japanese arrowroot. Roots are the focal points of a plant's energy. Most people know of the medicinal value of roots such as ginseng, radish, beetroot and carrots, but few of us are familiar with Kuzu. It is considered big medicine in Japan and China. It is also the world's premier cooking starch. Use it in stir-fry to give a beautiful glaze or as a thickener for custard or soup. If you view it as a starch, it is expensive but viewed as a medicine, it's incredibly cheap!

1 cup cold water

1 teaspoon kuzu starch

1 umeboshi plum, pitted and minced, or 1 teaspoon of puree

few drops fresh ginger

few drops shoyu (natural soy sauce) or tamari (wheat free soy sauce) – optional

METHOD:

In an enamel or non-metallic saucepan, thoroughly dissolve kuzu in cold water. Add umeboshi and bring mixture to a simmer over medium heat, stirring constantly. As soon as the mixture changes colour and becomes translucent, turn off heat and add ginger juice and shoyu (if desired).

All raw honey is antiseptic, antibiotic, antifungal and antibacterial – it never spoils. However, when it comes to serious infection, one honey that deserves a special mention is Manuka honey. It is particularly valuable because it has a much better anti-bacterial activity than other honeys due to its Unique Manuka Factor. UMF is a measurement of the honey's ability to kill bacteria.

In 2007 Professor Henle at the University in Dresden (Germany) “demonstrated that dietary *methylglyoxal* is directly responsible for the anti-bacterial activity of Manuka honey”. You will now start to see MGO as a measurement also: – UMF 5+ = MGO 30, UMF10+ = MGO 100, UMF 20+ = MGO 400, UMF 25+ = MGO 550.

Manuka honey is effective against a wide range of bacteria causing stomach ulcers (*Helicobacter pylori*), sore throats (*Streptococcus Pyogenes*), and wound-infecting bacteria (*Staphylococcus Aureus* and *Escherichia coli*). It assists in the natural healing of leg ulcers, wounds, burns, boils, cracked skin and MRSA (Multi Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus).

Manuka honey comes from New Zealand and is truly unique. Remember the higher the rating, the greater the anti-bacterial strength. It must be over UMF 16+ (MGO 100) to be effective at all.

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

Heritage Honey – producers of certified organic honey in Tasmania
www.naturalife.ie
www.manukahoney.com