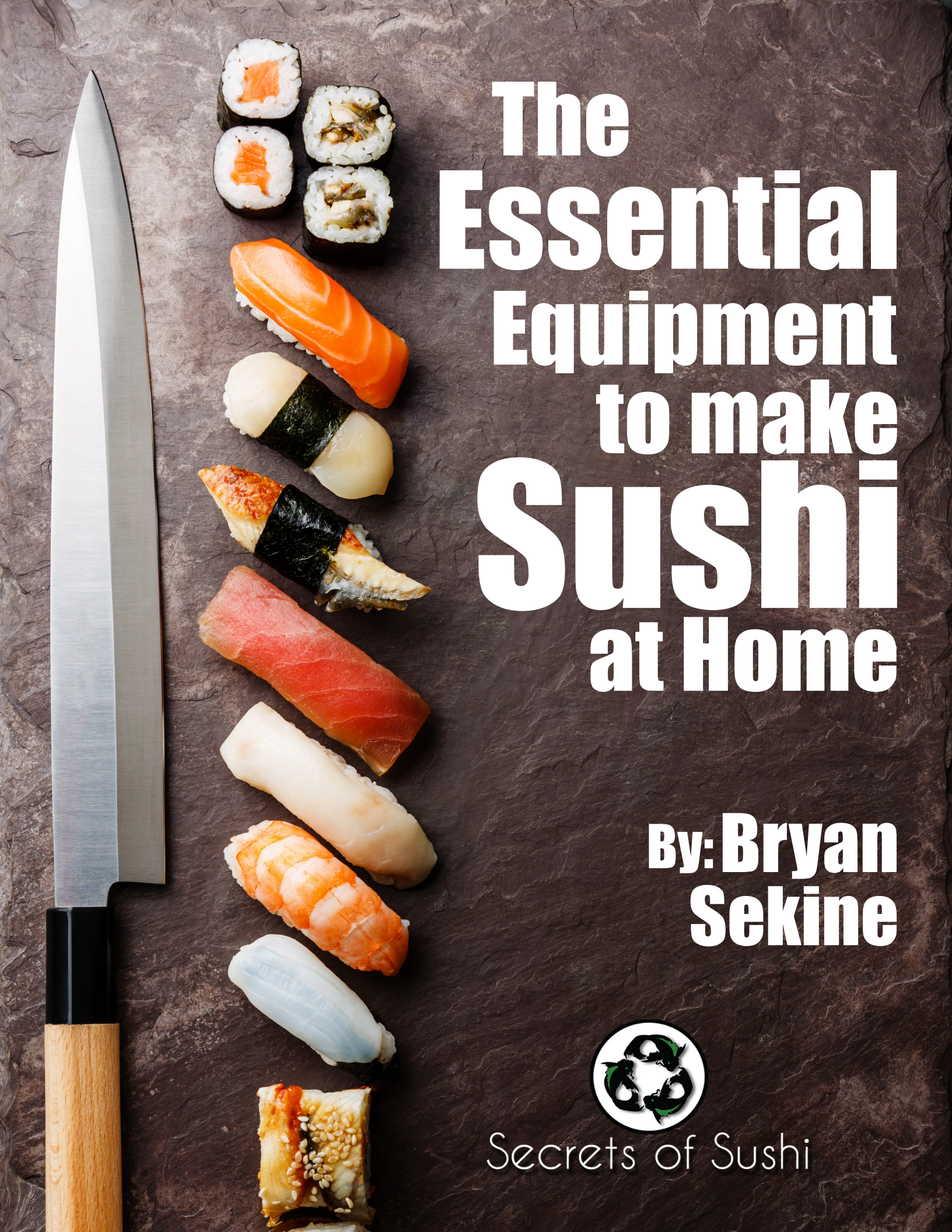




The Essential Equipment to make Sushi at Home

**By: Bryan
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Secrets of Sushi

The Essential Equipment to Make Sushi at Home

Including the Equipment I use to Make
Sushi Professionally!

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The information presented within this guide is for informational purposes only.

This guide is intended to assist in the preparation of sushi in one's home. Please consult a professional before consuming raw or undercooked foods. Special care and investigation should be taken by women who are pregnant or nursing. Any advice given within this document is based on my own opinion and personal experience.

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Thank you for visiting my website and taking the time to learn how to make incredible sushi at home. This guide will help you select which equipment you should use to make the best possible sushi!

Is the difference in equipment THAT important when it comes to sushi?

I'm sure you've noticed, there is a WIDE range of prices when it comes to buying a sushi knife and even a rice cooker. In this guide, I will break down the reasons behind the price discrepancy and explain why certain features matter.

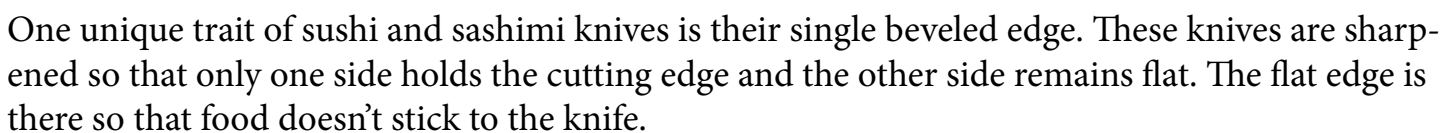
Being that the art of sushi as we know it today is over 400 years old, it doesn't surprise me that every aspect of the equipment used to make sushi has a purpose. There isn't a material, a shape, or a way that something is constructed that doesn't serve a purpose in making sushi.

In this guide, I will cover the most important pieces of equipment, in their order of importance:

1. Sushi Knives
2. Rice Cookers
3. Makisu
4. Hangiri

If you have any questions about the equipment, or about making sushi at home, please feel free to contact me via email: bryan@secretsofsushi.com. Enjoy!

Most sushi knives are made of high-carbon steel (not stainless steel). This means that the steel rusts easily, but is capable of attaining a much sharper edge.



It is rumored that most sushi knives are right-handed because it is better to cut fish with, whereas left handed knives are better for cutting shell fish. Left handed knives are usually custom made and very expensive.

Another unique quality of the knives is the handle. Traditionally, the handle was shaped with a “D” cross section. This was to make using the knife for long periods of time more comfortable. The handles are made with various types of wood and usually a bone cap towards the top.

The last unique trait of sushi and sashimi knives (which can also be seen in Japanese Katana) is the Tang. The tang refers to the metal portion of the handle that runs down the length. There are full tang knives and half tang knives. Full tang runs the entire length of the handle where as half tang does not.

Types of Sushi Knives

Deba– closest to a meat cleaver, the Deba is good for cutting through bones and cartilage of fish.



Yanagiba(willow-shaped)- the “standard” sashimi knife. Good for cutting sashimi and sushi rolls.



Usuba– the ideal vegetable knife, used more for fine cuts and peeling.



Santoku (three virtues)- used for fish, meat, and vegetables. This is a western-style knife that was designed to be a “one size fits all.” It is not a traditional knife, but it’s used a lot in Japanese homes.



While there are a few more types of knives used in the sushi industry, they are extremely rare and absolutely accessory. The above listed are considered the “essential” knives for sushi.

Deba

This is one of my personal favorites: the Deba (pointed carving knife). Although it is not necessary to own, I find it extremely enjoyable to use for the right job.

As a disclaimer, this is an accessory knife for casual sushi chefs. It is not required for in home use, but rather for serious chefs looking to pursue a career in Japanese culinary art. At home, it is perfectly acceptable to use a standard chef's knife for any of the jobs described below. This is a small, curved, Japanese carving knife. It is typically used to carve and portion fish. Because it has such an obtuse curve, it makes this blade ideal for removing fish heads and cutting through small bones without sustaining any damage.



While this could technically work on poultry and other meats, it would be advised to only use it on fish. This knife is NOT intended to cut through large diameter bones. Some sushi chefs use the back of this knife to tenderize meat or even break crustacean shells!

A Deba is the perfect hybrid between a cleaver and a chef's knife.

Usually these blades will be thick, single-beveled, power house knives. But a unique characteristic about them is their size: Most of these knives are between 4-6" blade length. Though it's not unheard of for a sushi chef to have a larger version (upwards of 12" blade at the most). The thickness and single-beveled edge make for an easy cut when separating the meat from the bone. The average price for a knife like this ranges from \$150-\$400. For artisan versions, the range goes from \$1,000- \$3,000! That's another reason why I recommend only investing in one of these if you are a serious sushi chef. This knife dates back to the 16th century Edo period (first seen between 1688 and 1704) in the city of Sakai. Like most Japanese cutlery, this knife is made of high-carbon steel and requires specific tools and techniques to maintain.

Yanagiba



Yanagiba, or willow-shaped, is the most commonly found sushi knife in any sushi bar. It is specifically designed to cut fish in one direction (pulling), as this will produce the best sashimi cuts.

What is considered to be a good sashimi cut?

It's shape, smooth surface, and sharp edges. The yanagiba (or just yanagi for short) is specifically designed to make sashimi cuts easier.

These knives are made from high quality, high-carbon steel. In order to retain their edge, they are made with two types of steel: a hard outer surface and a softer inner core.

Yanagi are single-beveled, which means that only one side of the blade edge is sharpened, and the other side is slightly curved in. The curved side is to prevent fish from sticking to the blade.

These blades are thicker than the average Western knife, but still considered relatively thin by Japanese standards.

Yanagi knives come in tons of different lengths. Which one should I buy?

These knives usually come in sizes from 200mm – 310mm (7.8" – 12"). Honestly, the length is only determined by personal preference. I use a 210mm yanagi because it fits my cutting preferences. Please remember that the longer the blade, the harder it will be to use (for most people).

These blades are used primarily for cutting and portioning raw fish. We will get into portioning on another page, but for now we will focus on cutting sashimi and sushi rolls.

Yanagiba (continued)

Cuts:

The single largest difference between Western knives and Japanese knives is the way in which they are designed to cut.

Western knives are designed to cut from the tip, pushing towards the heel of the knife to achieve the cut. Whereas Japanese knives are designed to start from the heel of the knife and pull towards the tip to achieve the cut.



The Japanese say that a “pull” cut is more precise and controlled than the “push” cut. However, in order to achieve a good pulling cut, the knife must be incredibly sharp. Pulling cuts do not allow for as much pressure to be used as a pushing cut- so the cut is achieved by the weight of the blade and its well-honed edge.

Push cuts are fast, strong, and used to cut through flesh and bones alike.

Pull cuts are slower, precise, controlled, and used for things like sashimi and trimming other meats.

Usuba

Like other sushi knives, the Usuba is a single beveled (or single edged) knife. As a disclaimer, this is an accessory knife for the casual sushi chef. It is not required for in home use, but rather for serious chefs looking to pursue a career in Japanese culinary arts. At home, it is perfectly acceptable to use a standard chef's knife for any of the jobs described below.

The name of this knife literally translates to “Thin Knife.” It is hand crafted to be the ideal knife for cutting vegetables. The thinness of the blade is perfect for making precise cuts and peeling.



The straight edge helps make complete contact with the cutting board, which also helps when cutting vegetables, fruit, and nori sheets. However, due to its thin design, it is more likely to chip or break if used improperly.

Why are thin blades ideal for cutting vegetables?

While you can cut vegetables with thicker blades, the thinner the cut of a vegetable- the more likely a thick blade will break the cut. Thinner blades are simply more capable of making thinner slices.

Why do the Japanese prefer thin cut vegetables?

The Japanese believe that the thinner the vegetable is cut, the more surface area is exposed to air – enhancing the flavor. It also increases the texture of the vegetables. Though, some American sushi chefs may argue the importance of tasting each ingredient in a roll, it is ultimately up to personal preference as to how thick you make your cuts.

Usuba (continued)

There are two distinct variations of this knife:

The Usuba – known for its blunt tip, straight edge, and rounded point.



The Kamagata-Usuba – known for its pointed tip and slightly curved edge (which is ideal for precision cutting).



Each version serves the same general purpose and it's really just personal preference as to which one to use.

Both variations can be made with a single bevel (which is almost always found in professional restaurants) or with a double bevel (found most commonly in homes). If the knife has a double bevel, it is referred to as a Nakiri Bocho.

The average length of a knife like this is between 6.5" and 8.5".

Santoku

The Santoku, or the three virtues, is not actually a knife used in many sushi bars. This blade is hand crafted with the intent to be a well-rounded, Eastern version of the standard chef's knife. The "three virtues" are slicing, mincing, and dicing. It's a perfect addition to every home, but many sushi chef's prefer to have a particular knife for each particular job.

These knives have a very unique shape to them: they are mostly straight, with a sharp (usually about 60 degree) curve towards the tip. They also tend to be thicker at the handle and thinner at the tip.



The Santoku is not a "traditional" sushi blade, rather a more modern addition to the Japanese kitchen. It is rumored that this knife was actually created in 1920! It's not uncommon to see several different variations of this knife. Typically, these blades are made of stainless steel and have unique "scallops" or recesses carved out of each side of the blade. These scallops are intended to make slicing easier by allowing air pockets to push the food off of the blade while you work (results vary).

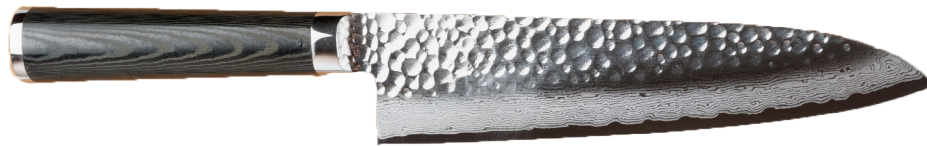
Santoku (continued)

Should I buy a Santoku?

That's a great question- one that I ask myself all the time. Personally, I would rather own several different knives than just one. But I know several chefs that prefer to go with the more minimalist approach. It all really depends on what your intentions are with the knives. If you want to go for a more professional career, you will need multiple knives anyway. If you want to keep it casual, then the Santoku can be a great foundation to your base cutlery.

I see that there are some really expensive versions as well as some cheaper ones. What's the difference?

Expensive: These knives are hand-made, folded, laminated, high-carbon steel. They are intended to be the best of the best. The folded steel will improve the hardness of the blade's edge and increase rust resistance. These versions are considered more "traditional" because they utilize the founding techniques of other Japanese blades. However, the more expensive versions will never have scalloped sides. NEVER put a hand crafted knife in the dishwasher.



Inexpensive: Easy to find, easier to clean, and (arguably) easier to use. These versions will vary wildly from one brand to the next. The knife's shape, curved edge, scallops, handle, and materials used to create it are all variables to consider when buying one of these knives. Different versions are made to fit different users- make sure you know what qualities you are looking for before investing in any knife! Avoid any variation with holes going completely through the blade (this might seem like common sense, but the scallops should NOT go all the way through). These are okay to wash in the dishwasher, provided that the manufacturers advocate it.



Buying a Sushi Knife

In this section, I will go over the Do's and Don'ts of buying knives. There are plenty of websites out there that will tell you that they sell "high quality, cheap knives." But I assure you, the terms "high quality" and "cheap" don't belong in the same sentence when it comes to sushi knives. You definitely get what you pay for.

There are two main groups of how a sushi knife is crafted:

Honyaki (true forged)- made from a single, high grade steel

Kasumi (mist)- made from two types of high grade metal (usually a hard, iron center and a softer high carbon steel)



When should you buy your own sushi knife?

Honestly, I went through two years of working at different sushi bars before investing in one of my own. Owning your own knife isn't necessary, but it is convenient.

Don't buy stainless steel sushi knives!

No questions asked. Stainless steel knives used for sushi are not as efficient, produce more mess than they are worth, and are not traditional. Don't buy them.

Buying a Sushi Knife (Continued)

If money isn't an issue, buy a Honyaki.

A Honyaki knife is typically a higher quality knife. Made by a single piece of steel and using a more traditional crafting/cooling process, a honyaki will have a higher carbon content without sacrificing its durability. Though, you should be careful of retailers that claim their knives are honyaki. Do a little research on the makers of the blades and always watch the price point. I would say that a good starting price for a true honyaki is about \$500USD.

What type of knife should I get?

This is entirely up to what you plan on doing with it. As a general rule of thumb, a Yanagiba will be the only knife that you will need (other than the knives you already own). However, as you start to make sushi more often you might want to consider getting other sushi and sashimi knives, such as an Usuba or Deba.



What about the Tang?

Previously, I thought that a full tang was the only way to go (mostly because my fondness with blades started with the Katana). However, unless you are planning to go into combat or use your knife to pry open your car door (please don't), you don't need a "full tang." In fact, there are some chefs that argue that a full tang knife has higher sanitation risks! There are several styles of knives that have a full tang with two pieces of the handle riveted onto it; these are typically seen in European knives.

Buying a Sushi Knife (Continued)

Traditional Japanese knives use a partial tang, or a “rat tail.” This means that the metal from the blade is tapered down and surrounded by the handle. The main reasoning for this is to secure the blade to the handle and add more balance to the weight of the blade.

If you order a knife and you can see a gap between where the neck ends and the collar begins (this is the bone or horn cap on the handle), send it back. The blade needs to be completely seated within the handle when you purchase your knife. In my experience, seeing that gap leads to the blade becoming completely unseated over time.

History of Sushi Knives

The techniques of hand crafting sushi knives date back to the 14th century-with many of the techniques (from sword smiths) going back as far as 1000 years ago. During the modernization of Japan (19th century), carrying Samurai swords became illegal. As such, the majority of sword craftsmen turned their business towards crafting sushi knife cutlery.

As with every art form in Japan, there are hundreds of years of accumulated knowledge and experience that are passed down from master to apprentice. To create a sushi knife, specific rules and procedures are followed to ensure the sharpest edge is achieved.

In Japan, there is one region that is world renowned for their metal work- Sakai City. Sakai has been known for their metal work since 500 A.D., after one of Japan's emperors died and decreed that a temple be built in his name.



After the temple was complete (many years before his death), many of the blacksmiths settled around Sakai permanently. With all of the best blacksmiths of Japan living in one place, it's no wonder that Sakai became famous for metal work.

Starting with swords, then rifles after the Portuguese introduced them, and then eventually sushi knives- Sakai, to this day, is known for the highest quality metal work.

2. Rice Cookers

Rice cookers are simple to use, simple to clean, and very consistent. I highly recommend investing in one of these if you cook rice at least once a month. I use mine once a week and I have been using the same cooker for over 5 years now!

But why are some of them \$300(USD) while others are only \$70(USD)?

Generally, the more expensive it is the more features it comes with. Some come with the ability to steam food at variable temperatures or steam vegetables while steaming rice at the same time!



There are a few key features to look for when investing in a rice cooker:

How many cups can it cook at one time?

What material is the bowl made out of? Stainless steel? Coated aluminum?

How many settings does it have? Do I need more than one setting?

Do I want to cook more than just rice in the steamer?

Here is a basic breakdown of cheaper vs. more expensive cookers:

(1 cup of uncooked, white rice is approx. 185 grams, for my metric friends out there!)

\$40(USD):

- Generally coated aluminum bowls.
- One button – when you plug it in, it defaults to the “warm” setting. Press it down to set to “cook.”
- Typical life expectancy of 2-3 years.
- Cooks between 2-4 cups of rice.



\$70(USD):

- Stainless Steel bowls as an option– you don’t have to worry about the coat chipping or leaking into your rice.
- One button cooking functionality, but are generally capable of cooking 4-8 cups of rice.
- Generally computerized to make slight adjustments to temperature and cooking times so you receive consistent rice every time!



\$130(USD)+:

- Stainless or Aluminum bowls.
- Cooks 6-10 cups of rice.
- Multiple settings – vegetables, brown rice, porridge, and quick cooking features.
- Retractable cord
- LED Screen and computerized adjustments
- Delayed timer



\$250(USD)+:

- Stainless or Aluminum bowls.
- Cooks 8-12 cups of rice.
- Multiple settings – vegetables, brown rice, porridge, and quick cooking features.
- Retractable cord
- LED Screen and computerized adjustments to cooking times
- Two delayed timer settings.
- Induction Heating element uses pressure and evenly distributed heat to create the best, fluffiest rice in the industry.

Now that you have a basic breakdown of the different features, you can get a better understanding of what you need before making a purchase.

3. Makisu

The Makisu, or sushi mat, is the bamboo mat used by sushi chefs to assist in the rolling process. It's simple to use and very affordable. If properly taken care of, a single mat can last for years!

A good sushi mat should be rounded on one side and flat on the other, at least 9.5" X 9.5" (24.13cm), and shouldn't cost you more than about \$6 (USD).



I see a bunch of sushi chefs that wrap their mat in something. What is it that they are wrapping it with and why?

Sushi chefs wrap their mats in food service film (or Saran Wrap) to prevent rice or other ingredients from getting stuck in between the bamboo sticks. While this isn't a necessary thing to do, it really helps if you are planning on making more than just a few rolls. It also makes clean up a breeze!

I've seen some plastic sushi mats. Do those work just as well or better than the bamboo mats?

To be honest, I haven't tried one yet. But I would be excited to know what you guys think about in the comments below!

I don't have an Asian market near where I live. Where can I buy one of these online?

I always use Amazon.com for my online shopping. I'll add a few links below so you can know exactly which kinds of mats I buy.

4. Hangiri

Sushi chefs around the world use a very specific type of wooden bowl, called a hangiri, to cool sushi rice. It's a large, flat, shallow bowl that resembles an old-styled barrel.



There are a few reasons why the chefs prefer this type of bowl over any other and I'll tell you exactly why!

The ideal features of a cooling bowl are surface area, even cooling, and moisture absorption. The shallow depth and flat base are also key components for cooling rice.

So wooden bowls absorb heat, but wouldn't metal or plastic bowls do the same?

Yes, but wood also absorbs excess moisture in addition to evenly absorbing heat.

Are they made of a specific type of wood? Or will any wooden bowl do the trick?

In addition to having a flat base, these large bowls are made from cypress. Cypress is a native tree in both central Japan and Taiwan and is specifically used for its resistance to mold, rot, insect infestation, and resilience to warping. Cypress also comes with its own, natural, preserving oil! It is easy to manipulate this type of wood and very cost efficient.

So as a sushi hobbyist, should I invest in one of these hangiri?

That depends on how often you will use it. As a hobbyist, it is perfectly acceptable to use a plastic bowl (but not a metal bowl, as it absorbs virtually no moisture). However, if you make sushi at least once a month, then you will quickly notice the quality difference in your sushi rice.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this. I would love to hear about your thoughts, comments, and questions! Feel free to send me a message on Twitter, Facebook, or even email me at bryan@secretsofsushi.com.



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