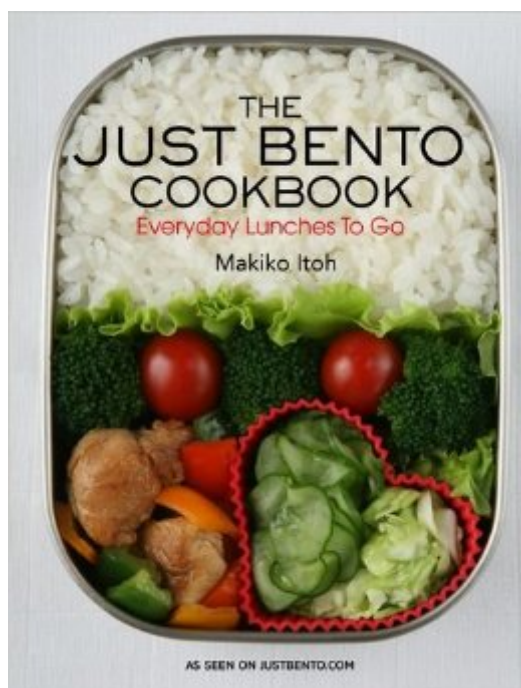


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The Just Bento Cookbook: Everyday Lunches To Go



Synopsis

Bento fever has recently swept across the West, fuelled not just by an interest in cute, decorative food, but by the desire for an economical, healthy approach to eating in these times of recession. A leading light in the popularization of bento has been Makiko Itoh, whose blog, Just Bento, has nearly 160,000 subscribers in the U.S. alone, all of whom love her delicious recipes and practical bento-making tips. Now, for the first time, Itoh's expertise has been packaged in book form. The Just Bento Cookbook contains 25 attractive bento menus and more than 150 recipes, all of which have been specially created for this book and are divided into two main sections, Japanese and Not-so-Japanese. The Japanese section includes classic bento menus such as Salted Salmon Bento and Chicken Karaage Bento, while the Not-so-Japanese section shows how Western food can be adapted to the bento concept, with delicious menus such as Summer Vegetable Gratin Bento and Everyone Loves a Pie Bento. In addition to the recipes, Itoh includes sections on bento-making equipment, bento staples to make and stock, basic cooking techniques, and a glossary. A planning-chart section is included, showing readers how they might organize their weekly bento making. In a market full of bento books that emphasize the cute and the decorative, this book stands out for its emphasis on the health and economic benefits of the bento, and for the very practical guidelines on how to ensure that a daily bento lunch is something that can easily be incorporated into anyone's lifestyle. This is the perfect book for the bento beginner, but will also provide a wealth of new bento recipe ideas and tips for Just Bento aficionados.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is the best and most accessible bento box I've ever seen. Its for grown ups. Chucking out most of the cute bits and hard-to-find ingredients, this book is perfect for someone who wants to have a fun lunch but not make a scene in the breakroom because of a smiley face on a sandwich (not that there is anything wrong with that!). Most ingredients in the book are easy to find (cherry tomatoes, egg, chicken, etc), and some of the more specialized ingredients (mirin, dashi stock, etc) are available any almost any asian grocery store or online. There are tons of recipes, with pages followed by variations on those recipes, cooking time charts and timelines, and even a glossary of Japanese food terms. Fantastic.

This book is not a showcase of selected posts from Makiko Itoh's excellent blog; it contains 150 especially created recipes, and instructive and attractive photos and diagrams and tips you won't find there. The recipes are practical enough for everyday use, with ingredients that won't leave you lost at the supermarket, and much effort has gone into explaining and illustrating the preparation of sushi rolls, onigiri, tamago, and so on; even explaining how to properly lay ingredients into single or two-tier boxes. Makiko has succeeded in distilling her experience making bentos in countries where staple Japanese ingredients are obscure and exotic, into a volume that's readably succinct yet shows impeccable attention to the needs of her audience. She even groups recipes into complete bento meals, with timelines showing how to prepare multiple parts of a meal simultaneously. It's clear that a great deal of effort has gone into producing a bento recipe book intended for everyday use rather than mere novelty.

For many non-Japanese who enjoy Japanese culture, especially the pop culture and have watched many anime series or drama series, or even read the manga, it is no surprise if you are curious about bento. The way they are put together and how creative they are (as well as economical), it's no surprise that more people outside of Japan are catching bento fever and wanting to make bento at home. So, what is bento? Think Japanese version of the school lunch but instead of a big thick lunchbox, there is creativity on the portions of what one eats and are typically set in a special container in which food is split. There is no big bulky apples or bananas or a big sandwich, for the Japanese, you have your steam rice, egg, vegetables, meats, etc. and it all fits into a container. And it's no surprise that bento boxes have become popular outside of Japan. People wanting to create economically cool bento boxes and who best to write about it than food blogger Makiko Itoh, owner of justhungry.com and justbento.com. Makiko has written "The Just Bento Cookbook: Everyday Lunches to Go" featuring 25 attractive bento menus and features more than 150 recipes which

include the Sushi Roll Bento, the Chicken Karaage Bento but as it does feature Japanese style bentos, she also has a not-so-Japanese section which has a Summer Vegetable Casserole Bento and Every Loves a Pie Bento. And what is important is that Makiko doesn't focus on cuteness or for the sake of having cute bento, she writes with care about nutrition and has easy-to-read, concise instructions that go along with photos. For example, using the cover image (featured above), the photo is for "Chicken and Three-color Pepper Stir-fry Bento". She shows you how to create the stir-fry with a recipe, plus how to make instant cabbage and cucumber pickles and blanched broccoli. Also, information on how to prepare basic white rice. She also has a time line of how long it takes to create the dish as well. After you make the dish, she then features how to prepare the food and place it into a single-tier and two-tier box. So, these are easy-to-follow instructions. So, what about the rolled up egg? How do they roll it up? No problem, she has pictures on how she does it. What about the zig zagged vegetables? No problem, she explains how to do it as well. And it's important to note that the ingredients featured on the Japanese recipes are ingredients you can find at your local grocery store. Especially if you have an Asian grocery store nearby. Granted, sesame salt or kabocha squash may not be at your local grocery store, but the goal is to improvise if you don't find some of these ingredients. Now, by using Makiko Itoh's "Just Bento Cookbook", you may be thinking...great, we got the recipe down, ingredients for the Japanese and non-Japanese dishes can be found but what about the actual bento box and equipment that Makiko uses. Now, this is the cool part of the book where she actually showcases bento boxes and accessories and where you can purchase them. Itoh also goes into foods that can be refrigerated or frozen and for those who are not familiar with the Japanese ingredients, she also has a glossary at the end of the book. So, for those who read and are not sure what "bonito flakes", "miso" or what "edamame" are... no problem, she explains what they are. Overall, this is a fantastic book for those wanting to prepare bento dishes. Sometimes blogs on how to prepare bento are hard to follow and Itoh recognizes the weaknesses of what others have tried to do and focuses on making the experience as easy as possible for those creating bento for the first time. So, if you are interested in making bento, I can easily say that "The Just Bento Cookbook: Everyday Lunches to Go" is perhaps the best book I have reviewed on bento thus far. Highly recommended!

Received this book and a bento box for my birthday from a friend. I knew what bento lunches were but never attempted to make one before although I am a good home cook and bag lunches to work often. The book is well written, friendly and easy going, with clear explanations and beautiful photos. A good history and description of bento boxes is provided as well as some background on the

author and motivation for writing the book. The recipes are easy to follow and use mostly ingredients that should be easy enough to find in any supermarket with an Asian section. Lots of diversity in the recipes provided from meat, fish, salads and treats. Included with each main recipe are a number of variations which help mix things up. This is a great little cookbook and I'd definitely recommend it to anyone looking for small meal ideas, even if you don't use a bento box this is good food!

I have never done bento before. When I decided to find a way to eat healthier lunches and stop buying the sodium-packed and carb-crammed "Healthy Choice" packs, I stumbled upon the concept of a bento box. I already loved Japanese culture as a whole; the people, traditions, history, everything! I even have several anime I adore. When I started reading up on what a bento was, I knew it was for me. I realized I probably couldn't just whip up a bunch of stir-fry and shove it in a Gladware, so I splurged on a real bento box, rice molds, sauce squeezers, and this book. I was absolutely blown away at how much information is in this book and the ease of its use. It gives step by step instructions on not only how to prepare the bento-specific meals, but how to pack the box itself, along with tons of other helpful info. I was worried that I wouldn't have time in the mornings to cook the food and have it fresh the same day, but the timelines are a huge help. There are countless tips, tricks, and hints throughout the book to make bento fun, easy, and healthy. The author even has website addresses in the back linking to their website with even more information, including a bento meal planner (HUGE help). Overall, definitely the book to buy for the bento beginner!

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