Soups / Japan

Kombu Dashi

Cold-brew kombu dashi — the purest expression of umami, a crystal-clear broth of nothing but dried kelp and cold water, the vegetarian backbone of Japanese cuisine with a clean oceanic depth.

Time 60 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 20 g Kombu (dried kelp), preferably ma-kombu
- ☐ 1000 ml Cold water (soft or filtered preferred)

Let's make it.

01 Examine the kombu: it should be dark brownish-green with a heavy white powder coating — mannitol, a natural sugar alcohol that is the foundation of kombu's sweetness and umami. Wipe the surface very gently with a barely damp cloth or dry paper towel, removing only any grit or debris. Do not rinse the kombu under running water and do not scrub: the white powder is precious and must be preserved. Cut or score the kombu into smaller pieces (about 10cm lengths) with scissors to increase the surface area exposed to the water.

02 Place the prepared kombu in a clean pot or deep container. Pour the cold water over it. Let it steep at room temperature for 30-60 minutes. During this cold extraction, glutamic acid, minerals, and mannitol dissolve slowly into the water in a way that hot extraction cannot replicate — hot water extracts faster but also pulls bitter compounds from the kombu cell walls. The water will gradually shift from clear to a faint golden-green as the glutamates dissolve.

03 Place the pot over the lowest possible heat setting. Heat very slowly, aiming for a temperature of 55-65°C — this range maximizes glutamate extraction while keeping the broth clean and clear. You will see tiny bubbles beginning to form on the surface of the kombu and on the bottom of the pot as the water approaches 60°C. This is the critical window. Watch closely: the moment these bubbles begin appearing on the kombu edges, the temperature is perfect. Do not allow the water to reach a simmer.

04 Remove the kombu pieces from the pot with tongs or a slotted spoon — do not squeeze or press them, which releases bitter compounds. Strain the dashi through a fine-mesh sieve (no cheesecloth needed — a well-made kombu dashi should already be clear). The finished dashi can be used immediately as a base for miso soup, noodle broth, or simmered dishes. Refrigerated, it keeps for 3 days. The spent kombu can be simmered with soy sauce and mirin to make tsukudani — a salty-sweet condiment.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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