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「Nara's Food Culture」 <http://www3.pref.nara.jp/foodculture>



# Nara, A Slow Food Capital Nara, the Birthplace of Japanese Food Culture

# Yoshino Hon-Kudzu



Nara was the site of Japan's capital, Heijō-kyō, established in 710. At the time, the city flourished as the political and cultural heart of the land. The capital's bustling population required that a steady supply of food and resources be brought from all over Japan.

While Nara is now famous for its historic shrines and temples, it was also known as a "food capital."



## A Snow-white Ingredient: Yoshino Hon-Kudzu



This fine white powder is Yoshino Hon-Kudzu, a premium starch known for its exceptional quality. The Yoshino region in southern Nara, with its high elevation and abundant mountain water, is ideal for kudzu starch production. Some manufacturers of Yoshino Hon-kudzu in this area have been perfecting the craft since the 1300s (Muromachi period) and others, since the 1600s (Edo period), preserving traditional methods that are still used today.

While starch is commonly extracted from potatoes or corn, Yoshino Hon-Kudzu comes from the root of the kudzu plant, a resilient climbing vine.



## Yoshino-zarashi Method "White Diamond" Production

The muscular hori-ko artisans who dig deep to unearth kudzu roots often find ones that are 10, 20, or even 50 years old. These artisans can identify the location of large kudzu roots by simply looking at forested mountain slopes. They carefully unearth the wild convoluted roots without damaging them.



The process involves repeatedly rinsing the starch in cold water to remove impurities, resulting in a highly purified product. After this, the Yoshino Hon-Kudzu starch is slowly dried. This traditional technique is called Yoshino-zarashi, passed down since the 1600s. The kudzu powder produced in this process is only about 10% of the total volume of the giant kudzu root.



## Yoshino Hon-Kudzu is Highly Sought After by Japanese Chefs and Confectioners

In traditional Japanese cooking Yoshino Hon-Kudzu is prized for the consistency it produces when setting savory goma-dofu (sesame jelly) and thickening sauces. It is also an essential ingredient in many Japanese sweets such as kuzukiri (kudzu noodles) and kuzumochi (kudzu sweets). What makes Yoshino Hon-Kudzu so valuable is its unique viscosity—a texture that remains smooth and consistent even when cooled, without becoming watery over time. This makes it the go-to choice for both chefs and confectioners looking to create exquisite dishes and desserts.

## Warm Up with "Kuzu-yu"

Looking for a soothing drink? Try Kuzu-yu, a warming drink made with Yoshino Hon-Kudzu. It's simple to prepare and offers a soothing, thick consistency perfect for chilly days.

### Basic Ingredients (for 1 serving):

- 1 tablespoon of Yoshino Hon-Kudzu powder
- 2 teaspoons of sugar
- 1 cup of water

### Directions:

1. Mix all ingredients in a small pot using a heat-resistant spatula.
2. Warm over medium-high heat while stirring continuously. Once the mixture becomes transparent and thickens, it's ready to serve.

Alternatively, you can flavor this warming drink with matcha (powdered green tea) or yuzu (citrus) for a refreshing variation.

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