

Japanese Home Cooking at Tanpopo Noodle Shop by Phyllis Louise Harris

When Koshiki Yonemura was growing up with her two brothers in Kyushu, Japan, the restaurant business was a family affair. Her father, grandmother and aunt ran the business. Today, she does.

Since the beginning of March, Yonemura has been offering the food of her childhood to capacity crowds, in her tiny Tanpopo Noodle Shop on Selby near Western in St. Paul. "I wanted to serve the food of the common people," said the young owner/chef, "the kind of food Japanese people eat everyday at home." Her spring menu concentrates on noodle soups with simple side dishes. Either Soba (buckwheat) or Udon (wheat) noodles are topped with Tempura, Beef, Wild Mushrooms, Teriyaki or the shrimp-chicken- vegetable combination of Nabeyaki in a lightly flavored broth. Served with the Japanese multi-pepper flavoring Nanmi Shichimi, a bowl of Tanpopo noodles is a flavorful meal in itself. Side dishes include Edamame, Spinach with Sesame Seeds, Japanese Salad and Agedashi Tofu. The restaurant also has a rice dish, two Sushi choices, beverages and dessert. Everything is freshly made each day from locally grown produce and it is still a family affair.

"My younger brother helps out in the kitchen," noted Yonemura, and her mother helps with a variety of tasks. "Friends have been helping me get started," she adds, "and we are beginning to find additional staff who understand Japanese food."

Yonemura's mother was from upstate New York and her father Japanese. When her father passed on, the family left Japan to live in Minnesota, home of her mother's family. "I went to high school here, then on to the University of Minnesota," said Yonemura, where she earned a degree in Psychology and Chinese. She decided to go back to the food business and worked in several Twin Cities Japanese restaurants as a kitchen person and server before opening Tanpopo.

"We expect to have our summer menu ready for the Memorial Day weekend," said Yonemura on a recent 88 degree day. "We really didn't expect this hot weather so soon," she added. It was so surprising even the air conditioning was not yet ready, but will be in time for more normal summer weather. The summer menu will concentrate on cold noodle dishes and salads while maintaining the simple flavors of home cooking.

Edamame is one of those simple dishes that shows off the clear flavor of young soybeans. Whole pods containing two plump beans are boiled then salted and served as a light, healthful appetizer. (Please don't try to chew the pods — just put the whole pod in your mouth to get the salt flavor, then press the soybeans out and discard the pod.) Agedashi Tofu is a satisfying combination of creamy tofu squares lightly battered and deep-fried, then served in a slightly sweet fish sauce and topped with Bonito flakes to add a salty chewy texture.

Located in the Selby Avenue-Cathedral Hill district next to Moscow on the Hill, Tanpopo Noodle Shop is open everyday except Monday for lunch and dinner. While they do not take reservations, call ahead to see if the restaurants' 35 seats are already filled and plan your arrival accordingly — 651-228-9967.

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