UMAMI

JAPANESE · MOTHER BASE · SIGNATURE · FERMENT · PANTRY STAPLE · MARINADE ENGINE

Shio Koji — Rapid Dry-Aging in a Jar

Rice koji, salt, and water. Seven to ten days of counter-top fermentation. The enzymes from Aspergillus oryzae — proteases and amylases — break down protein into amino acids and starch into sugars, producing a marinade that tenderizes faster than anything and adds deep umami on contact. Forty-eight hours of koji treatment approximates thirty days of traditional dry-aging.

Protein None (enzymatic marinade base)

Serves Makes ~700 g shio koji (enough for 15+ marinades)

Difficulty Beginner

Active 10 min day 1 + 30 sec daily stir for 7–10 days

Total 7–10 days active ferment · keeps 6 months refrigerated

THE STORY

The Enzyme Shortcut

There is a specific class of flavor change — the deep-umami-tender-melt that happens to a piece of beef after thirty days in a dry-aging chamber — that home kitchens don't have the infrastructure to produce. Refrigerated cabinets, humidity control, airflow management, time. And yet there is a technique used in Japanese kitchens for four hundred years that approximates the same chemistry in a Mason jar on the counter in seven days of fermentation plus a forty-eight-hour marinade. The technique is *shio koji*, and once you have a jar in the fridge, the rest of your cooking changes.

The mechanism is enzymes. Rice inoculated with Aspergillus oryzae — the same mold used to make sake, soy sauce, and miso — produces two industrial-grade enzyme families as it grows: proteases, which break proteins into free amino acids (umami and tenderness), and amylases, which convert starches into simple sugars (sweetness and Maillard precursors). Shio koji is a way of packaging those enzymes into a shelf-stable salt-water paste that can be rubbed on anything edible. Apply to a pork chop for four hours — you get dry-aged-adjacent tenderness and a 40 % faster Maillard crust. Apply to fish for thirty minutes — you get texture integrity plus instant umami season. Apply to vegetables for an hour — you get concentrated sweetness and mineral depth. It works because the enzymes work; they don't care about the cuisine, the cook, or the kitchen.

The build is fermentation at its gentlest: rice koji (Cold Mountain brand, the US gold standard), sea salt, filtered water, a jar, a week of patience. No scoby, no starter, no mother — the koji already contains everything. Stir once a day. Watch the mixture transition from crunchy rice-and-water to creamy, slightly sweet, faintly alcoholic paste. When the grains break between fingers and the liquid is viscous and pearl-white, it's done. Into a jar in the fridge, where it keeps six months and gets deeper over time.

AT A GLANCE

Specs

YIELD ~700 g (one 1 L jar)	BASE Rice koji + salt + water	RATIO (BY WEIGHT) `Koji 200 g : Salt 60 g : Water 400 g`	FERMENT TEMP 22–28 °C (room temperature)
DIFFICULTY Beginner ●○○○○	ACTIVE TIME 10 min + 30 sec daily stir	FERMENT TIME 7–10 days (Miami warmth: closer to 7)	STORAGE 6 months fridge · indefinite at best quality 3 months
SALT CONTENT ~8% (stable, safe, storable)	UNLOCKS 48 h rapid dry-aging · 4 h marinades · umami boost in sauces		

UMAMI ADAPTATION

What Changed & Why

Shio koji is a traditional Japanese fermentation — the ratios have been stable for 400 years. There is no "adaptation" of the technique itself; The adaptation is in how the jar gets deployed. The 🟢 Everyday tier uses commodity rice koji (Cold Mountain, available from any Japanese grocery or online) and standard sea salt, and focuses on the three highest-ROI applications: fish seasoning, steak pre-sear treatment, and vegetable finishing. The 🔴 No Limits tier uses heirloom Japanese rice koji + koji-grown rice strain specificity, adds a barley koji variant that produces subtly different enzyme profiles, and includes the advanced application of koji-coating as a finishing cure for 48 hours of SV short rib treatment.

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
TECH	30–45 days traditional dry-aging in a controlled cabinet	7 days shio koji ferment + 48 h koji-coat treatment	Produces protein breakdown and umami development at rates that approximate (not match) traditional dry-aging. Works at home without any specialty equipment.
ADD	—	Daily stir protocol — 30 sec per day, days 2–7	Oxygenates the koji, distributes enzymes evenly, prevents surface mold. Missing 2–3 days is fine; missing a full week risks uneven ferment.
ELEV	Single-jar basic shio koji	Two-jar parallel ferment — rice koji + barley koji (mugi koji)	Barley koji produces slightly different enzyme profile — less proteolytic, more amylolytic. Gives a second tool in the drawer for different applications (barley for vegetables + fish; rice for meats).
SUB	Generic rice koji, basic sea salt	🟢 Cold Mountain rice koji + kosher salt · 🔴 Marukura or Akita koji + Japanese aged sea salt + optional barley koji parallel batch	Higher-grade koji produces more active enzymes and a cleaner flavor (less raw-rice note). Japanese sea salts bring trace minerals that slightly alter the final balance.

INGREDIENTS

What You Need

🟢 Everyday

The Base

- 200 g rice koji (dried or refrigerated) — **Cold Mountain brand** is the US gold standard, widely available at any Japanese grocery or via online (Amazon, Umami Mart)
- 60 g fine kosher salt or sea salt (non-iodized — iodine inhibits ferment)
- 400 g filtered water (or spring water — never tap with heavy chlorine)

Equipment (counted here because it matters)

- 1 × clean glass jar, 1 L capacity, with a lid that can be closed loosely (not airtight during ferment)
- Clean wooden or plastic spoon (metal is fine but wood is traditional)
- Kitchen scale
- Sticky label for jar (date + batch number)

Substitution Notes

- *Can't find rice koji?* It must be real rice koji (Aspergillus oryzae on rice). Substitutes do not exist for the starter — this is a cultured-mold product, not a marinade. Order online if local sources are unavailable (Cold Mountain ships fresh; Amazon carries dried).
- *No kosher salt?* Any non-iodized salt works. Fine sea salt, pickling salt, even plain table salt without iodine. Avoid iodized salt (Morton Table Salt standard blue box) — iodine is an antimicrobial and inhibits the Aspergillus.
- *Tap water heavily chlorinated?* Filter or let water stand uncovered overnight to off-gas the chlorine. Softened water (sodium) is not appropriate.

🔴 No Limits

The Base — Japanese-Grade Koji

- 200 g **Marukura or Akita-prefecture rice koji** — higher enzyme activity, cleaner rice flavor profile, more consistent result. Sources: The Japanese Pantry (thejapanesepantry.com), Umami Mart (umamimart.com), Korin (korin.com).
- 60 g **Japanese sea salt** — Nuchi Masu (Okinawan) or aged Noto salt — adds subtle mineral complexity that reads in the finished koji
- 400 g filtered or low-mineral spring water
- Optional for 🔴 parallel batch: 200 g **barley koji (mugi koji)** + 60 g salt + 400 g water in a second jar — produces a different enzyme profile worth having in the drawer

Jar + Infrastructure

- **Weck or Le Parfait glass jar with loose-fit lid** (traditional fermentation jars with gasket removed for airflow)
- Cheesecloth + rubber band as an alternative lid — allows maximum airflow for vigorous ferment
- Thermometer for the room where the ferment lives — 22–28 °C target. In Miami this is most rooms year-round; in winter-cool rooms place on top of the fridge (warmer).

EQUIPMENT

Your Kit

- [ ] 1 L glass jar with loose lid (or cheesecloth + rubber band)
- [ ] Kitchen scale
- [ ] Wooden spoon (or silicone spatula)
- [ ] Digital thermometer for room monitoring
- [ ] Sticky label + marker (date, batch, koji source)
- [ ] Clean bowl (optional — for mixing before jarring)

MISE EN PLACE

Before You Start

- [ ] Clean the jar with hot water + unscented dish soap. Rinse thoroughly. Air-dry completely. No sanitizer needed — shio koji's salt content is self-sterilizing once the salt dissolves, but a wet jar can disrupt the initial salt dissolution.
- [ ] Weigh ingredients into jar in order: water first (400 g), then salt (60 g), then koji (200 g). This order makes the salt dissolve faster.
- [ ] Room temperature at start: 22–28 °C is the target range. Miami kitchens are typically in this range year-round.
- [ ] Label the jar: date of start, expected ready date (day 7–10), koji source.

MAKE-AHEAD

Timeline

Day 0 — Start the ferment
Water + salt + koji into clean 1 L jar. Stir vigorously 60 sec — koji rice will absorb water and begin to look cloudy. Lid on loose. On counter out of direct sun.

Day 1 — First stir
Stir 30 sec. Liquid should be less clear. Koji grains still distinct, slightly softened.

Day 2–3 — Aromatic shift
Stir daily. Smell transitions from raw-rice-grain to faintly sweet, slightly alcoholic, like sake kasu.

Day 4–5 — Creaminess develops
Mixture begins to look creamy. Grains soften. The liquid thickens noticeably. Smell: sweet, slightly funky, clearly fermenting.

Day 6–7 — Texture check
Grains should crush between thumb and forefinger with light pressure. Liquid is pearl-white and viscous. This is the ready state for Miami's warmth.

Day 8–10 — Cooler-climate finish (if needed)
If the texture is still firm, continue 2–3 more days. Taste a tiny amount on a finger: it should be salty, slightly sweet, faintly alcoholic, clearly fermented — not raw.

Done — Pack + refrigerate

Blend smooth (TM6 Sp 5 / 20 sec) OR keep textured (Japanese home tradition). Pack into clean jar. Fridge. Keeps 6 months; best quality in first 3.

METHOD

The Cook

1 Day 0 — Build the Jar

1. Set a clean, dry 1 L glass jar on the kitchen scale. Tare.
2. Pour in `400 g filtered water`. Tare.
3. Add `60 g fine non-iodized salt`. Tare. Stir with a clean wooden spoon until the salt fully dissolves — should take 30 sec of vigorous stirring. *Critical:* the salt must be dissolved before the koji goes in, so the koji experiences the correct salinity from the start.
4. Add `200 g rice koji`. Stir thoroughly until the grains are fully wet and dispersed — 60 sec more.
5. The mixture will look cloudy, with distinct rice grains suspended in salty liquid. That's correct.
6. Place the lid on **loose** (threads touching but not tightened) or replace with cheesecloth + rubber band. Fermentation produces CO_2; an airtight seal will build pressure.
7. Label: date, expected ready day (day 7 for Miami, day 9–10 for cooler rooms), koji brand.

> 🔬 **WHY THIS WORKS**
>
> The 200 g : 60 g : 400 g ratio puts the final shio koji at approximately 8 % salt. This is the critical number: above 10 % salt inhibits the Aspergillus oryzae enzymes, below 6 % admits competing microbes (mold, yeast, bacteria) that spoil the product. 8 % is Goldilocks — enzymes active, competition suppressed, shelf-stable for months. Salt must be non-iodized because iodine is antimicrobial and specifically impairs koji. Koji enzyme activity begins the moment grains hit water and peaks at the 22–28 °C range. Reference: Fermentation §Koji Products; Food Science Core §Enzymatic Transformations.

2 Days 1–6 — The Daily Stir

1. Once per day, open the jar and stir the contents for 30 seconds with a clean wooden spoon.
2. Watch for: liquid gradually thickening, grains softening, aroma shifting from neutral to sweet-fermented.
3. Smell check each day: day 1 smells like raw rice; day 3 smells faintly sweet and alcoholic (sake kasu territory); day 5 smells clearly fermented, slightly funky, sweet-earthy; day 7 smells mature — deep umami, slightly sweet, clean sour note.
4. **Do not skip more than 2 consecutive days.** The daily stir distributes enzymes evenly, prevents surface mold, and oxygenates the lower layers. A forgotten week of stirring usually produces a patchy ferment (top over-fermented, bottom under) but is not a disaster.
5. Surface changes to watch: a thin white haze on top of the liquid is normal koji bloom. Fluffy white mold is acceptable — stir it in, continue. Fluffy green, pink, or black mold: scrape off the affected area generously (2 cm margin), re-stir, continue. If regrowth within 48 h, discard and restart with fresh jar.

> 🔬 **WHY THIS WORKS**
>
> The stir does three things: (1) distributes enzymes that accumulate in layers as the ferment proceeds, (2) oxygenates the lower portions (Aspergillus is an aerobic mold and needs oxygen, especially during active enzyme production), (3) breaks up any surface film and suppresses mold growth. The daily schedule is convention; every other day works but produces a slightly less uniform ferment. The smell progression is a reliable qualitative marker — a ferment that isn't developing sweetness by day 3 is running cold (room under 22 °C), and one that smells sharply alcoholic or vinegary is running hot (over 30 °C). Reference: Fermentation §Daily Care; Food Science Core §Aspergillus oryzae.

3 Days 7–10 — Texture Check + Decision

1. From day 7 onward, run the **finger-crush test** each day: take a single rice grain between thumb and forefinger, press firmly. Ready state: grain crushes with light pressure into a creamy paste. Not ready: grain still feels gritty or crunchy.
2. Alongside the finger test, taste a tiny amount on a clean finger. Target flavor: salty, slightly sweet, faintly alcoholic, fermented-umami. If it still tastes raw (rice-grain flavor, one-dimensional salt), more days.
3. Miami warmth (24–28 °C year-round): usually ready on day 7, sometimes day 8.
4. Cooler rooms (20–22 °C): usually ready day 9–10.
5. A few days longer will not harm the shio koji; it will continue to deepen in flavor and break down slightly further in texture. The main failure mode of overferment is excess alcohol production (smells like sake) — which is still edible and usable, just different. The upper limit is ~14 days before noticeable quality drop.

> 🔬 **WHY THIS WORKS**
>
> The texture endpoint — grains crushable with light pressure — corresponds to the point where most of the rice's starch has been converted to sugars by koji amylases, and most of the rice protein has been broken down by proteases. Beyond this, further enzyme activity shifts to the liquid phase, producing more free amino acids and simple sugars but less textural change. The flavor endpoint aligns: salty-sweet-alcoholic-umami is the signature of balanced koji activity. Reference: Fermentation §Enzymatic Endpoints.

4 Finish, Blend, Refrigerate

1. Option A — **Textured (Japanese home tradition):** transfer as-is to a clean storage jar. Fridge. Chunky texture works well for rubs and marinades.
2. Option B — **Smooth (modern Japanese restaurant tradition):** blend in TM6 at `Sp 5 / 20 sec`, OR high-speed blender 30 sec. Smoother texture is easier for fish and delicate applications.
3. Transfer to clean storage jar. Label: "Shio Koji — [ready date] — [🟢 or 🔴 tier]". Refrigerate.
4. Keeps 6 months refrigerated. Best quality first 3 months; after 6 months the enzymes lose significant activity and the product shifts from active-enzyme to flavor-only. Still usable as a seasoning, no longer as a tenderizer.

5 Deployment — How to Use the Jar

1. **Fish:** 30 min – 2 h marinade. Rinse lightly before cooking (koji browns fast and can burn). Use on swordfish, salmon, tuna, cod, sea bream. Shio koji replaces salt entirely — do not additionally salt.
2. **Steak / pork chop:** 4–24 h marinade. Rinse thoroughly before searing (koji on the surface will carbonize at 300 °C+). The meat will have markedly faster Maillard + softer mouthfeel + subtle sweetness.
3. **48 h koji-coat for 'dry-aging in a jar' (🔴 application):** coat a piece of beef fully in shio koji, wrap in cheesecloth, rest in fridge 48 h. Scrape off before cooking. Best with ribeye, strip, or tenderloin. Produces tenderness and deep umami approximating moderate dry-aging. Works brilliantly with SRF Gold + kamado reverse sear.
4. **Vegetables:** 30 min – 1 h marinade on eggplant, mushroom, cauliflower, cucumber before grilling or roasting. Concentrates sweetness, adds umami.
5. **Sauce booster:** 1 tsp shio koji in a salad dressing, pan sauce, or soup adds immediate umami depth. Think of it as a replacement for salt + MSG + mild sweet.
6. **Eggs:** brush 1 tsp shio koji on eggs 15 min before frying. Result: creamier texture, seasoned throughout, ambient umami.

QUICK REFERENCE

Timing Cheat Sheet

STEP	TIME	CUE
Day 0 — Build jar	`10 min`	Salt fully dissolved before koji goes in
Daily stir (days 1–6)	`30 sec × 6 days = 3 min total`	Smell shift from raw rice → sweet → fermented
Texture check (days 7–10)	`30 sec per check`	Grain crushes between fingers with light pressure
Smell + taste verification	`1 min`	Salty + slightly sweet + faintly alcoholic + umami
Optional blend (smooth)	`30 sec TM6 Sp 5`	Uniform cream, grain bits gone

STEP	TIME	CUE
Pack + label + refrigerate	3 min	Label date, expected best-quality window (3 mo)

TROUBLESHOOTING

Emergency Protocols

🚨 **DAY 4 AND THE FERMENT SMELLS LIKE NOTHING / STILL RAW RICE**

Room is too cold. Move to a warmer spot — top of the fridge (gentle heat), near the oven, or into a closed microwave with the light on (produces 24–26 °C ambient). Add 2 more days to the timeline.

🚨 **DAY 4 AND THE FERMENT SMELLS SHARPLY ALCOHOLIC LIKE RUBBING ALCOHOL**

Room is too warm (over 30 °C). Move to cooler spot or into the fridge for 6 h to slow the ferment, then back out. The ferment will continue slightly alcoholic — this is acceptable and still usable but with a distinctive note. For next batch: check summer Miami heat and run the jar in an A/C'd room.

🚨 **BLACK, GREEN, OR PINK MOLD APPEARS ON THE SURFACE**

Scrape generously — at least 2 cm of the surface layer removed and discarded. Stir what remains thoroughly. Check again in 48 h. If mold regrows: discard the entire ferment and start fresh. Black/green mold on a koji ferment is typically a sign of under-salinity (salt wasn't fully dissolved, or the ratio was wrong); verify next batch by tasting the liquid on day 0 — should be clearly salty.

🚨 **FERMENT BUBBLES VIGOROUSLY AND PUSHES LID OFF**

Expected behavior in warm rooms. Loose lid is correct. If it's bubbling so hard the jar overflows: release pressure daily for the first 3 days. Do not seal tightly at any point.

🚨 **DAY 10 AND THE TEXTURE IS STILL CRUNCHY**

Cool room slowed the ferment. Add 3–5 more days, stirring daily. If still crunchy at day 15: blend smooth in TM6 and call it done — the enzymatic work is complete, the grains just haven't broken down mechanically. The blended product is fully functional.

🚨 FINISHED SHIO KOJI BROWNS TOO FAST WHEN COOKING FISH OR MEAT

This is normal — koji's simple sugars caramelize fast. Two solutions: (1) rinse the protein after marinating (removes surface coat while keeping the enzyme work intact), or (2) cook at lower temperatures (180 °C oven instead of 250 °C; medium kamado instead of direct 300 °C+). The browning IS partly the point — shio koji accelerates Maillard — but unrinsed on a screaming-hot kamado it will blacken.

DEEP DIVES

Technique Notes

🟡 The Enzyme Mechanism — Why Shio Koji Works

FOOD SCIENCE · UNIVERSAL · APPLIES TO ALL ENZYMATIC MARINADES

Aspergillus oryzae produces two industrial-grade enzyme families as it grows on rice: proteases and amylases. Proteases break protein molecules into shorter peptides and free amino acids. On meat, this manifests as tenderization (less connective-tissue integrity) plus umami (free glutamate is tasted as umami; bound glutamate is not). Amylases break starches into simple sugars — glucose, maltose, dextrin. On anything with starch, this means sweetness; on meat surfaces, it means faster Maillard browning because the reaction requires reducing sugars. Both enzymes are active from roughly 20 to 60 degrees Celsius; above 65 Celsius they denature and stop working. This temperature range means shio koji works during a room-temperature marinade, during refrigeration, and during low-temperature sous vide, but deactivates during high-heat cooking. Practical implication: the koji does its work before the heat arrives. Reference: Food Science Core §Enzymatic Transformations; Sous Vide Mastery §Enzyme-Assisted SV.

🟡 The Seven-Day Timeline in Miami

FERMENTATION MANAGEMENT · REGIONAL · APPLIES TO WARM-CLIMATE FERMENTS

Ferment times in cookbooks are for temperate climates. In Miami, where kitchen ambient runs 24 to 28 Celsius year-round, everything ferments faster. Shio koji is typically called for at 10 to 14 days in Japanese sources. In Miami the same recipe finishes at day 7. The same compression applies to miso (8 months instead of 12), kimchi (3 days instead of 5), and sauerkraut (5 days instead of 10). Rule of thumb: run warm-climate ferments on 70 percent of the book timeline, and rely on sensory endpoints rather than dates. Shio koji is ready when grains crush between fingers and the liquid is pearl-white and viscous, whenever that arrives. For cold-snap weeks in Miami winter (rare, low 60s Fahrenheit), add two days back. Reference: Fermentation §Miami Considerations.

🟡 Rinse Before Searing — The Koji Burn Trap

APPLICATION TECHNIQUE · UNIVERSAL · APPLIES TO ALL KOJI TREATMENTS ON PROTEIN

Shio koji on a protein surface contains two things that behave badly at high heat: simple sugars from amylase activity, and rice particles. Sugars caramelize at roughly 150 Celsius; the Maillard reaction with amino acids runs fast above 140. On a kamado at 300 plus, the koji surface blackens and carbonizes within 60 seconds. The fix is always the same: rinse the protein under cold water after marinating, pat dry, then sear. The enzymes have already done their work inside the muscle over hours. Rinsing only removes the thin surface coat that would burn. The crust that develops on rinsed koji-treated protein is still markedly deeper and faster than untreated, because free amino acids and sugars have been driven into the muscle fibers themselves. Counter-intuitive but correct: rinse, do not skip. Reference: Food Science Core §Maillard Threshold; Sous Vide Mastery §Post-Koji Searing.

🔴 No Limits: The 48-Hour Koji Coat — Dry-Aging in a Jar (Extends Application)

ADVANCED APPLICATION · EXTENDS DEPLOYMENT PHASE

Coat a ribeye or strip steak completely in shio koji, wrap loosely in cheesecloth, rest in the refrigerator for 48 hours. The enzymes work continuously at fridge temperatures (proteases slow down below 10 Celsius but do not stop). The result approximates what 21 to 30 days of traditional dry-aging would produce: substantial protein breakdown, deep umami development, markedly improved tenderness, and a slight funky note that reads as dry-aged on the palate. Scrape off the koji thoroughly before cooking; the meat should be pale and slightly tacky. Cook by any high-heat method — reverse sear on the kamado is ideal and pairs perfectly with SRF Gold or dry-aged prime (compounding the effect). Works on boneless cuts 30 millimeters and thicker; thinner than that gets over-tenderized to mush in 48 hours. For a thinner cut, drop to 24 hours. Reference: Sous Vide Mastery §Shio Koji; Protein Encyclopedia §Dry-Aging.

🔴 No Limits: Parallel Barley Koji Jar (Substitutes Base Koji)

ADVANCED KOJI PROGRAM · SUBSTITUTES BASE GRAIN

Barley koji — mugi koji — behaves slightly differently from rice koji. The starch profile of barley (higher amylose) drives amylases harder, so the finished shio koji tastes sweeter and more robustly malt-like. The protein profile (gluten instead of the non-gluten rice protein) drives proteases to produce a slightly different amino acid mix, with more glutamate in the final product. Functionally: barley koji is slightly better on vegetables and fish (where the sweet-malt lift is welcome) and slightly less ideal on red meat (where the rice koji's cleaner neutral profile lets the meat assert). Running both jars in parallel gives Pablo two tools; the technique is identical. Source: Cold Mountain also produces barley koji; The Japanese Pantry carries Japanese-origin barley koji. The extra 7 days of ferment is the only cost. Reference: Fermentation §Barley Miso and Mugi Koji; Pantry and Staples §Japanese Shelf.

🔴 No Limits: Shio Koji as Hidden Sauce Ingredient

ADVANCED APPLICATION · SAUCE BUILDING · CROSS-METHOD

One teaspoon of blended shio koji stirred into a salad dressing, pan sauce, soup, or marinade functions as a triple ingredient: salt, gentle sweetness, deep umami. It does work that would otherwise require a combination of soy sauce, a small amount of honey or sugar, and either miso or MSG. Professional Japanese-influenced kitchens use it this way routinely and invisibly. Specific applications: stir 1 tsp into the final mount of a French-style pan sauce for a ghost umami layer. Add to a Caesar dressing instead of Worcestershire for a cleaner umami. Whisk into scrambled eggs for instant seasoning. Rub on mushrooms 20 minutes before roasting to concentrate their natural umami. The koji disappears into the dish and leaves only flavor improvement — guests never identify the ingredient, only that the food tastes deeper than they expected. Reference: Sauces and Condiments §Pan Sauce Mounting; Sensory Calibration §Umami Detection.

PAIRING

What to Drink

🍷 Wine — Not Applicable

Shio koji is a pantry base, not a course

Pairings apply to the dishes shio koji finishes or marinates — see Menu Context below. The marinade itself has no direct pairing.

🥃 Cooking Companion

Junmai sake at room temperature (while jarring the batch)

Sake is fermented from the same Aspergillus oryzae mold that makes koji. Drinking sake while building shio koji is a direct tribute to the mold's 2000-year agricultural history. A small bottle for the build; the rest for later Japanese dinners where the shio koji applications shine.

CONTEXT

Menu Ideas

Downstream #1 — Shio-Koji Cured Salmon

Salmon fillet (Honolulu Fish Co 🔴 tier, or grocery sushi-grade). Coat in 2 tbsp shio koji on both sides. 45 min fridge. Rinse lightly. Pat dry. Pan-sear skin-side down on medium heat, 4 min, flip, 90 sec more. Serve with rice, furikake, and a squeeze of lemon. The fish comes out seasoned throughout, with a 30 percent faster Maillard crust and a silkier texture than untreated salmon.

Downstream #2 — 48-Hour Koji-Coated Ribeye

SRF Gold or Black bone-in ribeye (60 mm thick). Coat generously in shio koji. Wrap loosely in cheesecloth. Fridge 48 h. Scrape off koji cleanly. Cook using UMAMI-7 Chuletón method (oven 120 °C to 48 °C, kamado 90 sec per side). The resulting steak eats like a dry-aged ribeye after 3 weeks in a cabinet. Pablo's 'serve something guests can't find at restaurants' signature move.

Downstream #3 — Koji-Marinated Grilled Eggplant

Japanese or Italian eggplant, halved lengthwise, scored. Rub 1 tbsp shio koji on cut faces. Rest 30 min. Rinse briefly. Grill kamado medium heat (200 °C), flesh-side down first, 6 min. Flip, 4 min more. Finish with a drizzle of toasted sesame oil and scallion. Side dish for any grilled protein; vegetarian main course with grains.

Downstream #4 — Pan Sauce Booster

Any pan sauce from a seared protein. After reducing the fond + wine + stock, whisk in 1 tsp blended shio koji at the same time as the cold butter mount. The koji contributes an invisible umami and sweet note that lifts the sauce. Guests detect that the sauce is better without being able to name why. Pairs especially well with lamb leg jus (UMAMI-6 #4) and the chuletón pan drippings.

Downstream #5 — Scrambled Eggs Japanese-Style

Saturday morning simple: 3 eggs whisked with 1 tsp shio koji and a splash of cream. Soft scramble in butter on low heat (80 °C stovetop target). Serve on toasted sourdough with a drizzle of EVOO. 4 minutes, transformative ambient umami. The koji replaces all other seasoning.

YOUR NOTES

Cook Log

Session Notes

Date: _____ · Serves: ____ · Rating: __ / 5

Use this space to record what you changed, what worked, and what you'd do differently next time. Your future self will thank you.