

It's a wrap!



When it comes to making these delectable dumplings, the more the merrier!

By Madeleine Greey Photography by Donald Nausbaum

When Kaerynne and Kaz Nakamura first met trading kicks and punches practicing kendo in Toronto, they may have thought martial arts was their only passion in common. But all it took was a meal or two together to realize that food was the real fatal attraction.

“On our trips to Japan together,” recalls Kaerynne, “it was all about food.” Her eyes roll in ecstasy recounting three-hour meals consuming tempura as light as air, or evenings submerged in sushi and sashimi, topped off with a little *unagi no kabayaki* or barbecued eel.

But when it comes to down-home, comfort food, the Nakamuras

turn to gyoza, or pan-fried dumplings, a recipe that has been passed down three generations.

Kaz was born in Osaka, moving to Canada at age six. By the time he was 10 or 11, his mother, Kayoko Nakamura, started enlisting his help wrapping dumplings. Before long Kaz’s younger siblings joined in, learning the art of pleating and folding the thin, flour wrappers around a savoury concoction of meat, cabbage and seasonings. Gyoza-making became a family affair and the father of the clan, Takahiro Nakamura, likens its popularity to pizza.

“I can’t stop eating them,” says Kaz, who has been known to polish

off 50 in a sitting. “They’re just as good the next day heated up over rice – for breakfast,” he says, smiling.

The Nakamuras typically turn out 100 of the crescent shaped parcels at a wrap session and (sometimes) have enough left over to freeze raw. Kaerynne remembers her mother-in-law showing the couple how to make gyoza years ago.

“We watched and helped two or three times and now Kaz makes his own signature filling,” says nimble-fingered Kaerynne, who can wrap a gyoza as fast as any of her relatives. Kaz also presides over their electric, non-stick frying pan that offers just the right depth and width to properly fry, then steam the dumplings, which

are a Japanese version of the Chinese pot sticker.

A self-professed “foodie,” Kaerynne’s cooking interests span across Asia. While the family eats Japanese food perhaps one-third of the time, they also love Indian, Thai, Chinese and Korean cooking, along with a large repertoire of Estonian dishes that Kaerynne grew up eating.

“Blood sausages and Estonian *sült* with jellied pork and veal mould may sound disgusting to the uninitiated” admits Kaerynne, “but I adore them.” Her husband loves these dishes as well, including Kaerynne’s *kringel* or sweet bread, redolent with saffron, raisins and almonds.

Their daughters Astrid, 5 and Ursula, 3, are rapidly following in their parents’ foodie footsteps. While their parents patiently teach them gyoza Ps and Qs, both girls show more interest in chucking their chopsticks aside and plopping a glistening, fragrant dumpling directly into the hatch.

While the kids may ignore it, a good dipping sauce is essential to the gyoza experience. Kaz gravitates towards a simple mixture of soy and vinegar but Kaerynne favours ponzu sauce, a combination of soy, vinegar, fresh lemon juice and bonito (dried fish) flakes that she’s happy to pick up at J-Town, a veritable Mecca of Japanese food

essentials just north of Toronto in Markham.

When there, Kaerynne is likely to check her Blackberry to find a just-written shopping list from Kaz, reminding her to pick up some fresh, sushi-grade fish or a bag of frozen edamame (fresh soybeans) that are boiled, rinsed, dried and lightly salted to serve alongside gyoza. Kaerynne needs no reminders to stock up on marble-sized, purple *ume-boshi* or pickled plums, a self-confessed addiction. Chances are she’ll eat more than her fair share at the next gyoza session, but considering her kendo and karate schedule, she’ll have no trouble kicking it off.



Family wrappers. From left: Kaz adds his signature filling; Kaerynne and Ursula are on folding detail; Kaz and his mother Kayoko get ready to sample the nearly-cooked delicacies.

BECOME A WRAP STAR

Your first attempts at gyoza-wrapping are bound to feel clumsy and awkward. Many Japanese learn this fiddly art as children, gaining a lifetime of experience. Here are some tips:

EASY ON THE FILLING. Add too much and your gyoza will not seal properly. Add no more than 1½ teaspoons of filling per gyoza.

STICKY FINGERS MAKE CREASING A CHALLENGE. Keep a clean, wet cloth nearby for wiping fingers as you go.

BEGINNER ATTEMPTS MAY STRAY FROM VISUAL PERFECTION but will taste just fine. As long as dumplings are tightly sealed, anything goes. Without a tight seal, gyoza will split open when cooking.

BEWARE OF DRYING. As you wrap, keep a damp towel over wrappers and formed gyoza.

INGREDIENT GLOSSARY

GYOZA WRAPPERS are usually sold frozen in Japanese food stores, about 50 sheets per package. Look for round, white, flour-dusted stacks. While purists may disagree, it’s okay to use Chinese dumpling wrappers – slightly thinner than their gyoza counterparts. Look for beige-coloured round wrappers, not square, which are designed for wontons. Chinese wrappers can often be found refrigerated in large supermarkets.

MIRIN is sweet cooking wine, used in countless Japanese dishes such as teriyaki and sukiyaki.

NAPPA CABBAGE is an oblong, white and light-green cabbage now sold in most supermarkets. It’s milder and more tender than Western cabbage.

ASIAN SESAME OIL has a dark, golden hue as it is made from toasted sesame seeds (not raw). To protect the oil from going rancid, store in the fridge.

Down the hatch! The Nakamura family enjoy their gyoza dumplings. Back row, left to right: Kayoko, Takahiro, Kaerynne and Kaz, with daughters Astrid (left) and Ursula in front.



Gyoza Dumplings

Makes 100 dumplings.

Kaz Nakamura's toothsome, pan-fried Japanese dumplings are a crowd-pleasing favourite. Have several helpers around for the "wrap session."

1 lb	Nappa cabbage, coarsely chopped	500 g
1/4 lbs	lean ground beef	625 g
1/4 lbs	lean ground pork	625 g
1/4 cup	soy sauce	50 mL
1/4 cup	Mirin*	50 mL
2	green onions, green part only, minced	2
2-inch	piece ginger, grated	5 cm
3	garlic cloves, minced	3
1 tbsp	sesame oil	15 mL
1/8 tsp	white pepper	0.5 mL
100	gyoza wrappers, defrosted	100
3 tbsp	vegetable oil	45 mL

Dipping Sauce

1/2 cup	soy sauce	125 mL
1/2 cup	white vinegar	125 mL
2 tsp	sesame oil	10 mL

* Can be substituted with cooking sherry if necessary

1. In a large pot of boiling, salted water, blanch chopped cabbage for 1 minute. Drain and rinse under cold water. Over a bowl or sink, squeeze cabbage (in cheesecloth if

desired) to remove any excess water. Chop finely.

2. In a large bowl, combine cabbage, beef, pork, soy sauce, mirin, green onions, ginger, garlic, sesame oil and white pepper. Stir to combine.

3. To prepare for wrapping, line a tray with waxed paper, place gyoza wrappers on the counter (covered with a damp tea towel to prevent drying) and fill a small bowl with water.

4. Place a gyoza wrapper in your left hand, dip your right index finger into the water and moisten the outer rim of the wrapper. Place a heaping teaspoon of meat filling in the middle of the wrapper and fold into a half-moon shape, bringing the sides of the wrapper together at the center top. Pinch 5 to 6 creases all going in the same direction. Note that the interior side of the dumpling will have creases, the outer side remains flat and smooth, creating the dumpling's distinctive crescent moon shape with a flat, plump bottom perfect for sitting stable in the frying pan. Repeat.

5. Heat a large, deep frying pan at medium, add one tablespoon of oil, arrange dumplings in the pan fitting snugly. Cook 2 minutes. Add 1/2 cup water (expect splattering) and cover immediately. Cook 5 minutes. Remove cover, if water still remains, cover again for a minute. Cook until water is gone and dumplings are golden brown underneath. Repeat 2 times, or until all dumplings are cooked.

6. To make sauce, combine soy sauce, vinegar and sesame oil in a small bowl. Makes 100 dumplings.

