



Mikasa Japanese Bistro: Make your own sushi

by **TAMMY HANSEN**

photos **BRENDA HARTSHORN**

Homemade sushi is not for quitters. With sushi chefs practicing for years to attain excellence, it's reasonable to expect a few early misrolls at home, says Mikasa Japanese Bistro owner Harry Yu. »



Local sushi aficionados are enticed enough by the beauty of Yu's masterful creations to hire him to cater private, in-home parties, and he's happy to oblige when he isn't too busy at the restaurant. Mikasa moved from Stockton to a larger site in Lathrop last year, and catering is available in several Central Valley cities.

For the adventurous home cook seeking a do-it-yourself experience, Yu suggests learning basic techniques, starting with the simple but popular California Roll. The fish in the roll is cooked, and the ingredients are straightforward, affording the novice sushi maker the time to focus on technique.

"It's easy to make, but if you want to make a nice one you have to practice a lot," he says. "For sushi, everything is practice."

Speed is a skill essential to the master sushi chef, but for first timers, patience is more important, Yu says. Approach sushi making with an appetite for learning, and a better-looking dish will be the return on your patience.

"Each time you will see the improvement."

If you go: *Mikasa Japanese Bistro, 15138 Harlan Rd., Lathrop, (209) 858-1818, www.mikasasushilathrop.com*





sushi

Making California Rolls

or any sushi, requires several steps and the tenacity to master them. Yu offers the following tips to smooth early efforts.

The rice

- Use Japanese sushi rice and preferably a rice cooker to attain the right consistency. Long grain rice isn't sticky enough.
- Adding salt and vinegar is an art. Start with less and add more.
- Rinse your hands when handling the rice, but pat dry until just damp. This helps keep the rice from sticking to your fingers.
- Use room-temperature rice.

The roll

Search an Asian grocery store for essentials like a sushi mat and nori (seaweed) sheets. Trader Joe's is another option for gathering ingredients.

Invest in a sushi mat

Foil or plastic wrap are not substitutes. Think of the mat as a kitchen tool to be mastered.

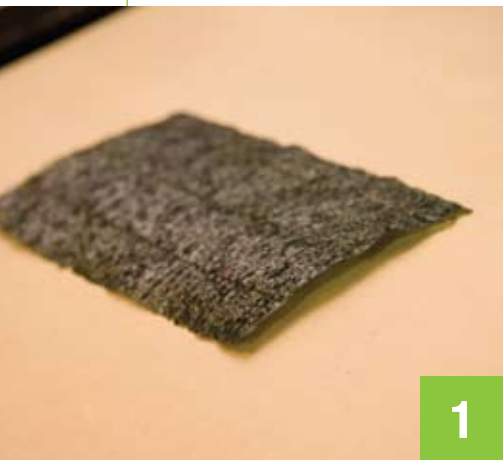
Practice makes perfect

Sushi chefs work for two years to attain excellence. Give yourself a few rolls before you give it up.

Use good knives

Use a sashimi or Iona knife (10 to 12 inch.





make it at home



CALIFORNIA ROLL

- 4 cups **sushi rice**
(prepare according to package)
- ¼ cup **rice vinegar**
- 2 Tbsp. **sugar**
- ½ tsp. **salt**
- 6 sheets **nori (roasted seaweed)**
- 10 oz. **imitation crabmeat (chunk or stick)**
- 1 **large ripe avocado,**
cut into ½-inch strips
- 1 **medium cucumber,**
peeled and cut into ½-inch strips

TOOLS

Bamboo sushi mat, bowl of room-temperature water, rice paddle or spatula

TO PREPARE

Transfer cooked rice to a bowl and cool to room-temperature. Douse rice with vinegar, sugar, and salt. Fold ingredients gently with rice paddle or spatula to evenly coat rice with vinegar. Do not over-mix or rice will become mushy.

1. Lay bamboo sushi mat on a flat, dry surface with slats running horizontally. On the mat, place one nori sheet with the shiniest side facing down, and the front edge (the edge closest to you) even with the bottom slat of the sushi mat. Rinse hands with water to prevent rice from sticking.

2. Spread a ¼-inch layer of rice evenly over the nori sheet, leaving 1/3-inch at the top and 1/4-inch at the bottom uncovered by rice. Rice will cover 2/3 of the nori.

3, 4. Lay strips of cucumber, avocado, and imitation crabmeat on the rice, about 3 inches from the bottom. Strips should be placed horizontally, in the same direction as the bamboo slats.

5. Starting at closest edge, roll the sushi mat away from you, around the filling. Use your fingers to wrap the nori tightly around the filling. When the mat touches the rice, reposition so the mat is not rolled into the California Roll by pulling the bamboo away from the rice. Starting farther down the bamboo mat, continue to tightly wrap the nori roll until you reach the end of the nori. Release mat and gently squeeze the finished roll several times to ensure that it is tight. Repeat with other six nori sheets.

6. Wet the blade of a sharp, 8-inch knife and cut each roll in half. Cut these in half again. Continue until you have cut each roll into eight pieces. (Rolls may be cut into straight or diagonal pieces.)

Serve with soy sauce and wasabi. Enjoy!