

Today I found a book about Japanese cooking in my desk and it reminded me that this is something I've wanted to write about for a long time. When I lived in France, I really wanted to learn how to make French foods. Especially since I was living with a host family, I thought it would be so easy to do! But since I didn't have much experience cooking, they simply assigned me to salad duty, so I always washed and dried the lettuce, put it in the bowl, and if I was lucky, got to make the salad dressing. I can make a good salad dressing, but I can't do much else when it comes to French cooking. Especially because of this experience, I decided that I would learn how to cook some Japanese foods, no matter what it takes.

When I came to Japan it seemed almost impossible to cook Japanese food. For one thing, I live alone, which makes it easy to eat the American style foods that I'm used to. When I got to Japan last year and went to the grocery store, I sometimes didn't even know what I was looking at! Mushrooms, sweet potatoes, and all sorts of other vegetables just look different here so I used to take my electronic dictionary with me just in case. I brought a book about Japanese cooking from home (it was in English) so every now and then I would make a new recipe and try to eat more Japanese food. But still, it was hard to do on my own!

In the past few months, I have been learning how to make some easy Japanese food with a friend who is also a teacher at my school. She took the time to show me things that seem easier to make, instead of starting with Japanese food like tempura or sushi which seemed impossible to make at home. Thanks to her, I learned how to make miso soup, some easy meals with tofu, and the most exciting thing yet—goya champuru! Slowly but surely, with her help and the help of some other friends who have been living in Japan for a long time, I have started to understand enough recipes that shopping at the grocery store is not so difficult. It's so much easier to cook foods that are more common in Japan, even if they are simple recipes, than trying to make things that I am used to eating at home.

Recently, I have become so interested in cooking that I have even started reading the magazine *Orange Page*. It's a fun way to learn more about Japanese cooking while I am practicing Japanese. While I often have to look up a few words, and sometimes just guess at the meaning of others, it's not as hard to follow the directions as I would have thought. Just making a Japanese meal is rewarding—but reading the recipe on my own and making a delicious meal is even better. I also went to a cooking lesson for ALTs in Hakusan cho, where I made tempura for the first time. I used to think it was so impossible to make things like tempura, but now I'm even considering trying it at home!

I usually cook for myself at home, so Japanese cooking is a fun way for me to learn more about Japanese culture and try to practice reading Japanese a little bit too. If you have any recipes that you think I should learn, let me know!