

A few months ago, I wrote a journal about how I had started to become interested in Japanese cooking. Although I still haven't mastered a lot of traditional Japanese dishes, I'm doing my best to cook at home on a regular basis, and I think it has really improved my quality of life!

Now is the first time that I have lived on my own. When I was a university student, I lived with friends at my university and we usually ate our meals at a cafeteria. Even when I lived in France, I lived with a host family and wasn't always responsible for my own meals. So even though I have lived away from my family for a few years, it was always easy to get by without doing much cooking. It's easy to get by in Japan without doing so much cooking either. Japanese bentos are easy to buy and usually delicious, so they are the perfect choice for a lazy cook. When I did make meals or lunches to bring to school, I used to often make things that I used to eat at home: sandwiches, pasta, and other simple dishes.

Since my last journal about cooking, I have made a lot more interesting foods that I found in some cooking magazines. It's so much fun to try new things and learn about foods at the grocery store that I never knew! Just recently, I've made some different dishes with the Chinese spice "toubanjyan." I never knew what it was until just a few weeks ago, but once I used it at home, I recognized the flavor from some things that I'd eaten in restaurants in Japan. I used it to make a broccoli and tofu stir-fry and then recently made a salad with harusame to bring to school in my homemade bento (I've been making one every day!). We don't use things like harusame or toubanyan often in cooking at home, but I'm sure that I will be able to find them in special Japanese or Chinese food stores when I go home. I'm just glad that I'm finding out about these things while I still can.

Looking back on old magazines and cookbooks that I've used in the past, I always find recipes that surprise me. Maybe something didn't catch my eye the first or second time that I looked at it, but I never let that stop me from trying it now. Just the other day I made something totally new—natto kimchi spaghetti. The first few times I flipped past that page in my magazine, I thought it looked disgusting. But for some reason the other day it appealed to me so I decided to give it a try. It was delicious! I never would have eaten natto kimchi spaghetti a year ago, but now it's one of my new favorites. I guess it just goes to show that no matter how comfortable you are in a situation, it's always good to try something new.