



### **Kuromame (Sweet Black Soybeans): A New Year's Tradition for Health and Hard Work**

Kuromame, or sweet black soybeans, holds a special place in Japan's traditional New Year's meal, symbolizing a wish for good health, sincerity, and success in the coming year. This



dish, cherished for generations, offers more than just a rich, earthy sweetness—it represents enduring values celebrated in Japanese culture. In

Japanese, the word "mame" translates to "bean," yet it can also imply "health" or "sincerity." Additionally, "kuro" means "black" but can suggest "hard work" with a subtle change in pronunciation. When kuromame is cooked with chestnuts (kuri), it symbolizes both health and success, making it a meaningful addition to the New Year's feast.

### **Local Foods in School Meals Bill**

Children, farmers, and communities greatly benefit from farm-to-school programs. According to the National Farm to School Network, these initiatives provide all kids with access to nutritious, high-quality, local food. Farm-to-school activities enhance classroom education by offering hands-on learning experiences related to food, health, agriculture, and nutrition.

Recently, the act relating to school meals, was introduced. This act requires the Department of Education to establish a recognition program to incentivize schools to submit plans for reaching the goal of having thirty percent of food served in schools consist of locally sourced products by 2030. It also authorizes the establishment of a plant-based meal pilot program at Mililani High School no later than the 2025-2026 school year. Supporting this bill is a good start toward increasing the inclusion of local foods in school meals.

The Hawai'i DOE will also implement six strategies to fulfill three USDA program objectives, including the Local Food for Schools (LFS) cooperative agreement.

Unlike typical black beans, kuromame are black soybeans. The preparation process requires patience: the dried beans must be soaked overnight and then simmered slowly to maintain their tender texture and distinct flavor. A unique tip for achieving the deep black color is to cook the beans with iron, traditionally using iron nails. The iron interacts with tannin in the beans, creating a natural darkening effect. Today, some people use a "Lucky Iron Fish" for this purpose, adding a modern twist to this tradition.



As you welcome the New Year, consider preparing kuromame for its symbolic wishes of health, sincerity, and success—a delicious reminder of resilience and dedication.

Written by JM

This strategy aims to strengthen business relationships between schools, farmers, and producers. It will also demonstrate the benefits of increasing the use of local products and provide guidance on fostering and maintaining farm-to-school relationships. The Hawai'i DOE is working to increase the amount of locally sourced foods in school meals each year, with a target of 50% by 2050.

By advocating for these bills and programs, we can see a difference being made in our local schools.

Incorporating advocacy tips such as being prepared, informed, knowledgeable, and actively engaged can help ensure that these initiatives succeed and that our students receive the nutritious, locally sourced meals they deserve.

To learn more about the benefits of farm-to-school programs, current bills addressing this topic, and advocacy tips, refer to the website links below:

<https://www.farmtoschool.org/resources-main/benefits-of-farm-to-school>

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/press-release/usda-expands-local-foods-school-meals-through-cooperative-agreement-hawaii>



## Kuromame (Sweet Black Soybeans)

### Ingredients:

Black Soybeans  
Dried Kuri (chestnuts)  
Soy Sauce 1/2 tbsp  
Water 2 cups  
Sugar 1/2 cup  
Salt 1/4 teaspoon  
Baking Soda 1/4 teaspoon



1. Clean the soybeans: Rinse the 200g black soybeans in water. Drain and set aside.
2. Season the soybeans: In a large saucepan, add the 1200ml water, 2½ tbsp soy sauce, and 200g sugar and bring to the boil. Stir until the sugar has dissolved. Once dissolved, turn off the heat and add the beans to the liquid. Adding the beans to the hot liquid is key in ensuring that the beans do not later wrinkle while cooking.
3. Soak the soybeans overnight: Cover the sauce pan and leave to soak overnight. After soaking, bring the pan to the boil and then reduce to low heat. Skim the scum off the surface as the beans start cooking. This will help to remove any bitterness.
4. Boil and simmer the soybeans: Boil the beans on low and skimming the surface. Once most of the scum has been removed, add a drop lid to the sauce pan by fashioning a drop lid out a circle of aluminum foil. Continue to simmer the beans until soft for about 5-6 hours.
5. Ready to serve: Once finished simmering, remove the beans from the heat. Allow to chill, and then serve with other osechi dishes for New Year's.

I hope this delicious kuromame will bring you health for the new year.

## Black Soybean Nutrition Facts and Health Benefits

Black soybeans are a nutrient-dense variety of the well-known yellow soybean. Like their yellow counterparts, black soybeans are an affordable, complete source of plant-based protein and a valuable addition to a balanced diet. They can be enjoyed in various forms, including dried and rehydrated, or pre-cooked in cans, making them a convenient option for meals. Here's a closer look at what makes black soybeans a nutritious choice.

**Carbohydrates:** A half-cup serving of canned black soybeans contains 8 grams of carbohydrates, most of which is fiber. This high fiber content aids in slow digestion, which can help manage blood sugar levels by preventing rapid spikes.

**Fat:** Black soybeans contain healthy fats, including omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids.

**Protein:** A half-cup serving of black soybeans provides 11 grams of plant-based protein. Unlike many other legumes, soy is a complete protein, containing all essential amino acids your body needs, making it an excellent protein choice for plant-based diets.



**Vitamins and Minerals:** Black soybeans are packed with essential nutrients, including vitamin K, iron, potassium, magnesium, copper, manganese, and riboflavin. These nutrients play vital roles in bone health, energy production, immune function, and overall vitality.

Health Benefits of Black Soybeans

### 1. Supports Heart Health

Diets rich in plant-based proteins like black soybeans are associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular disease. A 2012 study highlighted that soy's isoflavones—a natural compound found in soy—were linked to reduced coronary heart disease risk.

### 2. Repairs Oxidative Damage

The deep color of black soybeans signifies their high antioxidant content. Similar to berries, the dark hull of black soybeans contains antioxidants that help protect cells from oxidative stress, which can lower the risk of chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and certain cancers.

**Including Black Soybeans in Your Diet:** Whether you're seeking a protein boost, heart health support, or a fiber-rich addition to meals, black soybeans are a versatile, nutritious option. Their mild flavor pairs well with various dishes, making them easy to incorporate into soups, salads, and stir-fries. Give them a try to explore the health benefits they can bring to your plate.