

Making Maple Leaf "Momiji" Tempura

Momiji tempura are deep fried confectionary with a nostalgic flavor, enjoyed by everyone and perfect as a souvenir. Momiji leaves are dipped in a batter made of high quality flour, white sesame seeds and sugar. They are then deep fried in canola oil until they're fragrant, crunchy and faintly sweet.

Step 1: Collecting the leaves

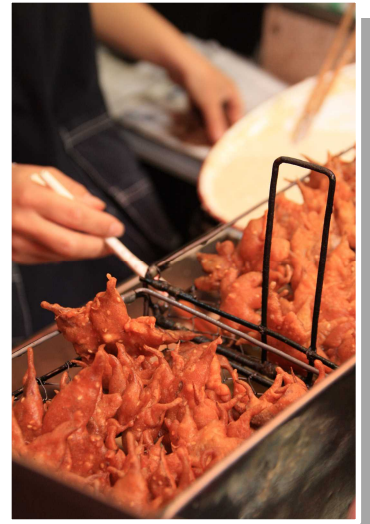
The leaves are carefully collected by hand, one by one during the peak of momiji leaf season from mid November to the beginning of December.

- The momiji leaves used for tempura are not from the standard iroha tree that grows naturally on Mt. Minoh, but from a special type of tree called "ichigyoji kaede".

Step 2: Preserving in salt for 1 year

After the leaves have been collected they are gently washed and then immediately preserved in salt. If they aren't preserved straight away they lose their color.

- The bitter taste and leaf veins need to be removed in order to make delicious momiji tempura.





Step 3: Removing the salt

Take the nicely shaped leaves and wash the salt off in running water or soak them in water.

- The salt needs to be washed off properly to make plump momiji tempura.
- When sorting the leaves, about 20% - 30% will be unusable due to bugs or damage.



Freshly fried tempura are delicious, but they're even better when the oil has been drained.

Each leaf is fried by hand one by one for 20 minutes. They're made with a lot of time and effort.

The "ichigyoji kaede" tree that the leaves used for the tempura come from is a palmate leaf that usually has 5-9 points. Leaves with 9 points are rare. If you receive a momiji tempura with 9 points surely something good will happen!



Step 4: Frying

The batter is very simple, consisting of just flour, water, sugar and sesame but the exact amounts used is a secret!

Depending on the shop they may add less or more sugar, or use white or brown sugar. Each shop has their own flavor.

When there is a lot of sugar in the batter it is very easy to burn the tempura so it takes many years of experience to be able to fry them properly. Each leaf is fried carefully, it takes skill to fry the momiji and retain the shape of the leaf.

Drain the oil properly.



History of momiji tempura

Approximately 1,300 years ago a person known as En'no Gyoja came to Mt. Minoh in the pursuit of knowledge. En'no Gyoja praised how the beautiful momiji leaves set off the waterfall. It is said that he began to make these tempura and fed them to visiting travellers of the Shugen-do religion (religion that combines aspects from different belief systems which originated around the 7th century said to have been headed by En'no Gyoja).