

Description: Spawn on kelp is a specialty seafood product composed of broad leaf sea kelp with a covering of herring eggs. It is also known in Japanese as komochi konbu and kazunoko konbu.

Spawn on kelp has a creamy, delicate sea-like flavour and a crunchy texture. It can be used as an ingredient in a variety of dishes or on its own, either raw or cooked.

Product Forms: Spawn on kelp is available as a whole leaf, sliced or dried product. Whole leaf and sliced product is packed in 100% brine and available in pails or vacuum-packed pouches.

Availability: Spawn on kelp is harvested annually between the end of February and June, with the primary harvest months being March and April.

Product is available year round but orders should be made before the season to ensure delivery because the year's inventory is usually subscribed by the end of June.

Buying Tips: When buying spawn on kelp ensure that: the eggs appear fresh, translucent and crunchy; the eggs covering one piece of kelp display a consistent colour; the layer of eggs is strongly adhered to the kelp and not peeling off, and; the product is appropriately packed in buckets with a brine solution or securely vacuum packed with tight seals.

Storing Tips: Spawn on kelp that is stored in 100% brine solution and its original packaging can be stored in the freezer for up to 1 year. For best results, the product should be stored at a cool controlled temperature from -10°C to -20°C (14° F to -4° F), and stored in brine. Marinated product can be stored in a refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

Preparation/Usage: Spawn on kelp is packed in 100% brine solution as soon as it harvested and stored accordingly until ready for use.

When ready to be used, the product must first be rinsed by placing it in a bowl with cool water running over it for about 15 minutes. The length of rinsing time will vary according to the amount and thickness of the product. Rinsing should continue until desired salinity is obtained. To test the salinity level, simply taste the product or place it between teeth and inhale a bit of air through the product. Rinse only as much product as is required at the moment.

When used as an ingredient, it is recommended that spawn on kelp is used in preparations that call for a minimal amount of cooking as this will help retain the creamy, delicate sea-like flavour of the product and preserve the crunchy texture of the roe. Overcooking will cause the eggs to turn white and create a bitter taste.

Historically, spawn on kelp has been primarily prepared according to Japanese or First Nations tradition. First Nations use it as a main course by blanching or pan frying it. The Japanese use spawn on kelp as an appetizer or as sushi and often marinate it in various ingredients including soya sauce, mirin and sake. Today, new ideas include serving it in various dishes including appetizers, soups and salads, tempura and even as cocktail garnishes.

Area of Origin and Range of Availability: Spawn on kelp is harvested along the west coast of the British Columbia mainland, the west coast of Vancouver Island and the southern part of the Queen Charlotte Islands.

It is also produced in San Francisco, Alaska and Russia. In addition, Atlantic Canada, Finland and Sweden are considering developing a similar product.

Harvest Volume: British Columbia is the world's leading supplier of spawn on kelp producing an average of 400 tonnes of product each year which accounts for approximately 80% of the world's annual supply.

Harvest Method: Kelp is harvested by hand and strung on lines across an enclosed bay or inlet (called a closed pond). Herring are captured in nets and towed to the pond where they are then released to spawn onto the kelp. Once the herring have spawned, the kelp is harvested and the live herring are released.

A small amount of spawn on kelp is also harvested using the open pond method where kelp is strung on lines that are suspended in the open ocean ready for herring to spawn onto the kelp.

Processing Method: Immediately after harvest the product is trimmed, salted/brined in containers on grounds and then transported to a custom processing plant where it is graded and packaged into 32 lb to 34 lb pails for export or domestic sales.

Markets: Japan is currently the primary market for the world's supply of spawn on kelp. Virtually all of British Columbia's product is exported to Japan. Annually, a very small amount of it is also resold from Japan to Hawaii and another very small amount is sold in British Columbia.

Sustainability: Spawn on kelp is harvested under individual quotas of 8 tonnes each to ensure sustainable harvests and a stable market supply. The production and harvest methods themselves are deemed "just and ethical" as the herring that spawn onto the kelp are released into their natural environment live and in good condition once the product is harvested. And, any harvested product that is not suitable for the market is immediately returned to the ocean where the roe can develop into mature herring. In addition, licence holders through SOKOA - Spawn on Kelp Operators Association continue efforts to work closely with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to increase comanagement efforts; SOKOA has co-ordinated and funded a coast-wide monitoring program since 1995 to monitor harvest practices and quotas, and; in 2003, SOKOA will implement the Canadian Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing Operations guidelines into its Fisheries Management Plan.

Historical and Anecdotal Information: Spawn on kelp has been harvested by British Columbia's First Nations for food and trading for generations and first developed into a commercial fishery in the 1970s when ponding methods used in the herring bait fishery were combined with First Nations' expertise in harvesting spawn on kelp.

While Japan was the first market for commercial spawn on kelp, early photos show First Nations trading with the Japanese as far back as the early 1900s. This historical relationship and strong cultural ties made spawn on kelp a highly sought after delicacy for the Japanese high-end gift market in the 1980s.

The Japanese names for spawn on kelp translate as "many babies" and accordingly the product is especially consumed in Japan during new year celebrations, some perceive it as a 'lucky' food and others link it to fertility.

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION

Nutritional Facts: Not available

Macrocystis kelp is high in protein , iron, iodine and zinc.