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Japanese Kani Salad カニカマサラダ

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This light, refreshing, and colorful Japanese Kani Salad recipe is so easy and quick to whip up with imitation or real crab, corn kernels, and cucumbers. Tossed in a creamy citrus-soy dressing, it's guaranteed to be a hit with your entire family!





If you frequently visit Japanese-American sushi restaurants, you would be familiar with Kani Salad. A colorful salad featuring shredded imitation crab and crunchy vegetables in a mayonnaise-based dressing. It's light, creamy, sweet, crunchy, and savory. I can see why Kani Salad receives such popularity in the US.

Here, I am going to share how the Japanese prepare the **Japanese Kani Salad** (カニカマサラダ) with a homemade dressing.



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What is Kani Salad?

Kani Salad, or what we call *Kanikama Salad* (カニカマサラダ) in Japan, is a Japanese crab salad that is a popular home-cooked side dish, but it's not something you'll see on the menu at restaurants. Outside of Japan, however, it's a staple in many Japanese-American sushi restaurants or Japanese steakhouses.



Kanikama (Imitation Crab Sticks)

Kani (カニ, 蟹) in Japanese means crab, while *kanikama* refers to **imitation crab meat (or imitation crab sticks)**, a seafood product made of starch and pureed white fish such as pollock or cod. These crab meat sticks are meant to imitate the taste and texture of the fresh crab. It is a popular ingredient in sushi and salads because of its long-frozen shelf life and ease of use.

You could use real crab meat (especially if you're looking to make it gluten-free) for kani salad, but we normally use imitation crab for convenience. I used imitation crab in my recipe as I developed an allergy to crab when I was in my early 20s.





Key Tip to Achieving Best Kani Salad

In Japan, the original salad is called the *kanikama* salad and it is done slightly differently from the American versions. To be honest, I was rather surprised to see how different the salad is made here.

A good salad should be in perfect harmony as balance is important in Japanese cuisine. That means not overdoing it with ingredients, dressing, or panko breadcrumbs! Less is more in this recipe.

Ingredients For Kani Salad

- Imitation crab meat (also known as *surimi* in the US, or *kanikama* in Japan) or real crab meat
- English, Persian, or Japanese cucumber (the ones with less seeds)
- Sweet corn kernels (fresh, frozen, or canned)
- Dressing (see below)
- Optional add-ins: vegetables such as julienned carrot, edamame, glass noodles or kelp noodles.

For a delicious Kani Salad, it's important to keep the ingredients simple while creating a contrast of textures and tastes. You should taste the harmonious flavors in every bite.

For Homemade Mayo Ponzu Dressing

The dressing for this Kani Salad is quick and simple to mix up, using only four ingredients.

- **Japanese Mayonnaise (Kewpie Mayo)** – see more below.
- **Ponzu sauce** – Made of soy sauce and citrus juice, ponzu lends a tart-tangy savoriness to the creamy mayonnaise. You can find it at Japanese/Asian grocery stores. Or make a quick ponzu sauce by combining 1 Tbsp rice vinegar, 2 tsp soy sauce, 1-2 tsp lemon juice, and 2-3 tsp orange juice or mirin.
- **Soy sauce** – regular or gluten-free
- **Toasted white sesame seeds**

This dressing is a balance of creamy, tangy, bright, and zesty. You can make it ahead and store it for 3 days in the refrigerator.



Japanese Mayonnaise (Kewpie Mayo)

You want to use Japanese mayonnaise to make kani salad if possible. The mayonnaise is richer, and creamier than regular mayo, and the slight tang and sweetness would make a difference in the dressing.



It's worth getting Japanese mayonnaise so you can also make [Japanese Potato Salad](#), [Japanese Egg Sandwich](#), or [Spicy Mayo](#) for your sushi. The most popular brand is the Kewpie mayonnaise. You can buy this mayonnaise on [Amazon](#) [🔗](#), or from your local Japanese and Asian grocery stores.

I also have a [Homemade Japanese Mayonnaise](#) recipe. Look for the easy version if you need to use the regular American mayonnaise.

Variations

This salad is also great for improvisation. The only advice I have is to keep your combination simple and not to include more than 6 ingredients.

- ❶ **Spice it up!** You can make spicy kani salad by adding some sriracha sauce and fresh grinds of black pepper to the dressing.
- ❷ **Add a tropical touch** with mango or pineapple.
- ❸ **Add some crunch.**
- ❹ **Fancy up** by topping with fish roe such as tobiko.

What to Serve with Kani Salad

I like to serve my Kani Salad on a bed of lettuce leaves to give the salad some height and bring out the colors. We enjoy this Japanese salad with pretty much everything! Japanese housewives often serve it as part of [Ichiju Sansai](#) (Japanese 'one soup three dishes' meal), but you can certainly serve this tasty kani salad with popular dishes such as:

- Sushi meals such as [California Roll](#), [Dragon Roll](#), maki sushi, etc.
- [Rice bowls](#)
- [Tempura](#)
- [10 Minute Meal – Mentaiko Pasta](#)

If you wish to make ahead or serve it at a potluck, just make sure to keep the salad and dressing ingredients separately in the refrigerator. Mix everything together right before serving. It will be a hit with everyone!

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Japanese Kani Salad

★★★★★ 4.73 from 68 votes

This light, refreshing, and colorful Japanese Kani Salad recipe is so easy and quick to whip up with imitation or real crab, corn kernels, and cucumbers. Tossed in a creamy citrus-soy dressing, it's guaranteed to be a hit with your entire family!

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PREP TIME:
20 mins

TOTAL TIME:
20 mins

SERVINGS: 4 (as side dish)

Tap or hover to scale the recipe!

INGREDIENTS

US Customary

Metric

1x

2x

3x

- ☐ 5 oz **real or imitation crabmeat** (1 package of a Japanese brand of *kanikama*)
- ☐ ½ **English cucumber** (6 oz, 170 g; or use Persian or Japanese cucumbers with less seeds)
- ☐ ½ cup **frozen or canned corn** (2.8 oz, drained; run frozen corn under cold water to defrost)

For the Ponzu Mayonnaise Dressing

- ☐ 2 Tbsp **Japanese Kewpie mayonnaise** (you can make homemade **Japanese mayo**)
- ☐ 1 Tbsp **ponzu** (you can make my **Homemade Ponzu** recipe)
- ☐ 1 Tbsp **toasted white sesame seeds**
- ☐ ½ tsp **soy sauce**

Japanese Ingredient Substitution: If you want substitutes for Japanese condiments and ingredients, click [here](#).

☐ **Cook Mode** Prevent your screen from going dark

INSTRUCTIONS



- 1** If you're using imitation crab, cut the sticks in half crosswise. Then, shred **5 oz real or imitation crabmeat** into thin strips. Peel ½ **English cucumber** in a striped pattern. Cut the cucumber in half lengthwise, then cut diagonally into thin slices.



- 2** In a medium bowl, combine the shredded imitation crab, cucumber slices, and ½ **cup frozen or canned corn** (defrosted/drained) To the

same bowl, add the dressing ingredients: **2 Tbsp Japanese Kewpie mayonnaise**, **1 Tbsp ponzu**, **1 Tbsp toasted white sesame seeds**, and **½ tsp soy sauce**. Combine well. Serve the salad in individual bowls or a large serving bowl. Enjoy!



To Make Ahead of Time

- 1 Keep the salad ingredients and dressing ingredients in separate containers in the refrigerator. Mix together right before you serve.



To Store

- 1 You can store the leftovers in an airtight container and keep it in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.

NUTRITION

Calories: 121 kcal · **Carbohydrates:** 13 g · **Protein:** 3 g · **Fat:** 7 g ·

Saturated Fat: 1 g · **Trans Fat:** 1 g · **Cholesterol:** 7 mg · **Sodium:** 370 mg

· **Potassium:** 115 mg · **Fiber:** 1 g · **Sugar:** 3 g · **Vitamin A:** 100 IU ·
Vitamin C: 2 mg · **Calcium:** 27 mg · **Iron:** 1 mg

Author: Namiko Hirasawa Chen **Course:** Condiments, Salad **Cuisine:** Japanese

Keyword: crab, japanese mayonnaise, ponzu

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Editor's Note: The post was originally published on March 7, 2011. The pictures were updated in June 2014 and the content was updated on August 5, 2022.

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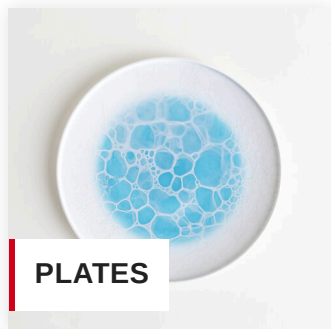
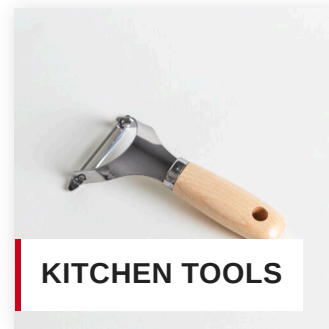
About Namiko Hirasawa Chen

I'm Nami, the recipe developer and founder of Just One Cookbook. I was born and raised in Yokohama, Japan, and now live in San Francisco with my family. Here, you will find easy and authentic Japanese recipes you'll love and enjoy!

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JOC Goods, our new online shop, offering Japanese tableware and kitchenware, is now open. It is a natural extension of Just One Cookbook's mission to teach home cooks how to prepare and enjoy delicious Japanese meals. We believe that beautifully plated food can bring joy and happiness to people's lives.

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36 COMMENTS



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Mariko

🕒 2 years ago

No need to drain the cucumber slices?

👍 0

↩ Reply

Naomi (JOC Community Manager)

Admin

🗨 Reply to [Mariko](#) 🕒 2 years ago

Hi Mariko! Thank you for trying Nami's recipe!

You can simply mix the veggies and dressing, and no need to drain unless you prefer using the Aasazuke cucumber (pre-salted cucumber).

We hope this helps! 😊

👍 0

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