

# Wagashi

In Japan, many people eat wagashi for dessert. Wagashi are **traditional** Japanese sweets. Unlike a lot of American candy, wagashi are mostly made of natural **ingredients**. One very common ingredient is a sweet paste usually made from beans, sweet potatoes, chestnuts, or fruit.

Professional wagashi makers often decide on the ingredients and **decorations** of wagashi according to the season. In the springtime, cherry blossoms grow all around Japan. In the fall, maple trees turn bright orange and red. Wagashi makers use these plants as **inspiration** during these seasons.

There are many different types of wagashi. One popular type is nerikiri. Nerikiri is made from sticky rice flour, sugar, and white bean paste. Nerikiri are sometimes molded into shapes of flowers, birds, or leaves. People often eat nerikiri and other wagashi with green tea.

A lot of **professional** wagashi makers have taken many years to learn all of their skills to make wagashi. These sweets are very **delicate** and beautiful.

# Hedgehog

A hedgehog **gathers** leaves. It carries them in its mouth and makes a pile. Why? The animal is making a winter nest. It will soon **hibernate**. That means it goes into a long, deep sleep.

Some hedgehogs live in places where winter is cold. Food is hard to find. The hedgehogs eat a lot of food in the fall. They store fat in their bodies. When the animals **hibernate**, they live off the extra fat.

During their long winter sleep, the animals use very little energy. They do not move. Their body **temperatures** drop. Their hearts beat slowly. They breathe slowly too.

When the weather gets warmer in March or April, the hedgehogs are hungry. They leave their nests to eat again. What do hedgehogs like best? Insects, worms, snails, and slugs!

Hedgehogs aren't solely meat eaters, though. They also eat vegetables and other food like grass, leaves, fruit, roots, fungi (like mushrooms), and seeds.

Whatever they eat, hedgehogs eat a lot—as much as a third of their body weight in a single night! Therefore, that's why they **hibernate** through the winter when there's little food.

# The Meaning of True Wealth

There was a girl whose family was very wealthy. One day her father took her on a trip to the country where he aimed to show his daughter how poor people live. So they arrived at a farm of a very poor family. They spent several days there. On their return, the father asked his daughter, if she liked the trip.

Oh, it was great, dad - the girl replied.

Did you notice how poor people live? - the father asked.

Yeah, I did. - said the girl.

The father asked his daughter to tell in more detail about her impressions from their trip.

Well...we have only one dog and they have four of them. In our garden there is a pool while they have a river that has no end. We've got expensive lanterns, but they have stars above their heads at night. We have the patio and they have the whole horizon....the daughter replied in delight.

She further added.... We have only a small piece of land while they have the endless fields. We buy food, but they grow it. We have a high fence for protection of our property and they don't need it, as their friends protect them.

The father was stunned. He could not say a word.

Then the girl added...Thank you, dad, for letting me see how poor we are.

This story shows that true wealth as well as happiness is not measured by material things. Love, friendship and freedom are far more valuable.

# The Magic Shirt

A great king said to his son. "Son! I am not well. Go and bring a good doctor."

The king was not really well. But he said, "I am sick. I am sick."

He was lazy. So he fell sick.

A great doctor came. He examined the king.

He said, "You are not sick. You are well and strong."

The king was angry. "I do not believe you. You are a fool." The king cut off the doctor's head.

Another doctor came. He said, "Oh King! Sleep one night in the shirt of a man who is happy. You will be happy and well."

The king called his servants. He said to them, "Go and get me a shirt of a happy man."

The servants went in search of a happy man. They saw some rich people. The rich people said, "We are NOT happy. We are poor."

The poor people said, "We poor men are always unhappy. So our shirts will not be useful to your king."

The servants went to a beggar. He was laughing and singing. He was rolling on the grass. The servants said to him. "You are a happy man. Give us your shirt. We will take it to the king."

The beggar said, "I have no shirt at all."

The servants told this story to the king. He learned a lesson. He went out of his palace. He worked hard. He was happy. The people were also happy.