



JAPAN INFORMATION
AND CULTURE CENTER
在米国日本大使館広報文化センター

TEACHING TUESDAY

MOCHI-TSUKI

Mochi-tsuki (餅つき) is a traditional event performed in preparation for the New Year at the end of December. Literally meaning “pounding rice-cakes,” the event involves the pounding of rice to make traditional rice cakes, or *mochi* (餅).

The process of making mochi is quite simple. Although mochi is often made with machines now, mochi-tsuki is a time when people resort to the traditional methods. First, a special type of sticky rice called *mochigome* (餅米) is soaked overnight and steamed or boiled. In the morning, it is placed in an *usu* (臼), a large bowl typically made of wood or stone, and then pounded with a *kine* (杵), a large wooden mallet. Mochi-tsuki is a two person job, with one person pounding the rice with the *kine* and a second person shifting and folding the rice with a bit of water in the *usu* to make sure the mochi is even and not lumpy.

Once the rice has been pounded into the smooth, sticky mochi, it is dived up into small portions. Two portions are set aside to become part of the *kagami mochi* (鏡餅), a pair of round mochi the size of plates stacked on top of each other as an offering for the New Year. The mochi are eaten for the dawn of the New Year, either plain or lightly cooked and flavored with soy sauce or placed in a soup called *ozoni* (お雑煮), which is eaten on New Year’s Day.

And if you don’t want to go all the way to Japan to experience this tradition, multiple groups in the DC-Maryland-Virginia area host a Mochi-tsuki around New Year!