

nori

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Nori

Red algae of the genus *Pyropia* (formerly *Porphyra*), shredded, poured into thin sheets and dried — the same paper-making method used for washi. It is essentially pure umami in a dry sheet, and a strip torn over a bowl seasons it more than its weight suggests.

Modern nori farming exists because of Kathleen Drew-Baker, a British phycologist who in 1949 worked out the *Porphyra* life cycle and its hidden shell-boring phase. Japanese growers, whose harvests until then depended on luck, credit her with saving the industry; there is a monument to her in Uto, Kumamoto.

Grades and forms

- **Yaki nori** — plain toasted sheets. The default for rolls and for tearing over bowls.
- **Ajitsuke nori** — pre-seasoned with soy and mirin, sold in small snack packets. Sweeter; fine over rice, wrong for sushi.
- **Kizami nori** — pre-shredded.
- **Aonori** — a different genus entirely, powdered green, for okonomiyaki and yakisoba.

Grade tracks colour and gloss: near-black with a green sheen is high grade; brownish, dull or full of holes is

low.

Using it in cold food

- **Cut it with scissors**, into fine strips, straight over the bowl.
- **Add it last.** Nori absorbs moisture instantly and goes limp and slippery within minutes of touching a dressing. This is the whole handling rule.
- **Refresh a limp sheet** by passing it briefly over a gas flame or a dry pan — it crisps and darkens in seconds.

Furikake — nori, sesame, salt, dried fish or shiso — is the ready-made version of this garnish and worth keeping a jar of.

Keeping

Opened nori goes soft fast. Store sealed with a desiccant sachet, and refrigerate or freeze if you use it slowly.

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