

What is Wasabi?

Wasabi is that pale green condiment that sometimes comes with sushi. Wasabi flavor has been compared to mustard or horseradish—indeed wasabi is sometimes called Japanese horseradish—but the flavor and smell of real fresh wasabi are unique. It is a wonderful condiment or spice and has many other uses as well.

Forget what your dictionary says, the Japanese pronunciation is wä'-sä'-bē, that is accent on both the first and second syllables.



The wasabi plant (*wasabia Japonica* or *Eutrema wasabi*) is native to certain areas of Japan, where it grows in or near cool mountain streams. It is cultivated in Japan and several other parts of the world including the Pacific Northwest of the USA and Canada. To make the condiment paste, a wasabi rhizome (above-ground root stem) is ground or grated with a very fine grater, preferably a few minutes before use.

An excellent essay on wasabi by food expert Elizabeth Andoh, reprinted from *Mangajin*, is in <http://www.mangajin.com/mangajin/samplemj/Wasabi/wasabi.htm>.

But most sushi bars in America, and indeed also in Japan, serve *imitation* wasabi because the real thing is difficult to grow and expensive. Imitation wasabi, “wasabi wannabe” as we call it, is usually made from horseradish, mustard, and food coloring, often as a powder to be mixed with water to make a paste. Real wasabi loses its flavor if dried, so even if the powder claims to contain some real wasabi, you won’t taste it.



Some approximation to fresh wasabi is available in a squeeze tube containing real wasabi. But imitation wasabi is also available (for less money) in a squeeze tube—read the label carefully!



From left to right in this picture: (1) powder containing some wasabi but no wasabi flavor, then four squeeze tubes: (2) more wasabi than horseradish (but water first ingredient), (3) more wasabi than horseradish (wasabi first ingredient), (4) mostly wasabi, and (5) mostly wasabi.

Following is a list of growers of fresh wasabi in North America. All these growers are willing to ship fresh wasabi rhizomes in commercial quantities intended for restaurants and markets.

Attn: Mr. Roy Carver
 Pacific Farms
 88420 Highway 101 North
 Florence, OR 97439

800-927-2248
<http://www.freshwasabi.com/>

Attn: Shih Ting Lin
 Stone Lin Wasabi Farm
 8520 204th Street
 Langley, BC V2Y 2C2
 Canada

604-513-0031

Attn: Ms. Patty Johnson
 Olympic Mountain Evergreen Farm
 2933 West Skokomish Valley Road
 Shelton, WA 98584

360-426-6543

Attn: Dr. Brian Oates, President
Pacific Coast Wasabi Ltd.
450 – 1050 Albern Street
Vancouver, BC V6E 1A3
Canada

604-682-4577
<http://www.wasabia.ca/>

Attn: Mr. Jones
The Frogfarm
3408 NE 193rd Street
Seattle, WA 98155

206-361-1981
<http://www.wasabifarm.com/>

The following companies import wasabi and wasabi products from Japan to North America.

Attn: Kaori Yazawa
Southern Tsunami
AFC Corporation
19205 South Laurel Park Road
Rancho Dominguez, CA 90220

310-604-3200
<http://www.afcsushi.com/>

IMP Foods, Inc.
(Division of International Marine Products)
1021 South Railroad Avenue
San Mateo, CA 94402

<http://www.impfoods.com/>

Sales & Marketing Department
JFC International, Inc.
540 Forbes Boulevard
South San Francisco, CA 94080-2018

800-633-1004
<http://www.jfc.com/>

S&B International Corporation
23430 Hawthorne Boulevard, Suite 125
Torrance, CA 90505

310-378-0898
<http://www.sbfoods.co.jp/>

Notes revised: 2004 August 28, <mailto:JohnABall@worldnet.att.net>