

How to Make Nigiri Sushi

Basic Setup

Nigiri means grasped, or squeezed. This is the basic style of the Edo style sushi. The sushi rice component of the nigiri is called the shari, and the main ingredient is called the neta. The rice should not be squeezed too tightly, or too loose. Ideally, the rice should not fall apart when the sushi is picked up, but will easily fall apart with no effort when consumed.

While preparing any type of sushi the hands must always remain wet and cold to prevent heat transfer to the ingredients. Ice water is set nearby to frequently cool the hands. It is also important to keep the hand slightly wet, so the sushi rice does not stick to your hands so after immersing both hands in ice water, tezu, or diluted sushi rice vinegar is applied on the hands. This acts as a sanitizer as well. A light “clap” gets rid of excess moisture.

Some main ingredients are harder to make into a nigiri, since they don't stick to the rice as easily, and some ingredients can be smaller. For this reason, there are four methods to make the nigiri. The first couple of steps are the same for all four types of nigiri methods. (For left handed people, please replace the left and right in the explanations)

Basic First Steps (Setup)

Hold the ingredient with your left hand by lightly pinching it . Simultaneously, form a ball of sushi rice with your right hand. The sushi rice should be but loose at this point.

Your hands should look like this at this point. Now rub the wasabi on your index finger onto the ingredient.

Place the sushi rice onto the ingredient. With your right index finger and thumb, set the length of the sushi rice and with your left thumb, press on the center of the sushi rice to make a dimple.

This dimple is important for making air pockets in the sushi rice to make the finalized sushi easy to fall apart in the mouth.

Now you are ready to move on to any of these methods below, depending on your ingredient or nigiri style.

Yokote-gaeshi (Side Hand Flip) Method

The side hand flip is the easiest method of making nigiri sushi. It is used mainly for fish ingredients, since they easily stick with the sushi rice. This method creates the popular funazoko style nigiri.

Sur la table

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Kotegaeshi (Wrist Flip) Method

The wrist flip is the fancy variation of the hand flip. It gets its name from a jujutsu (now used in aikido) wrist lock, where the wrist of the opponent is pushed towards them. The ingredients are flipped in a similar movement of the wrist.

Tategaeshi (Vertical Flip) Method

The vertical flip is used for sushi ingredients that are hard to stick to the rice, or may be disfigured if it is squeezed. Such ingredients are squid, octopus, egg, and sea eel. This method creates the fuazoko, or kushi style nigiri.

Hontegaeshi (Original Hand Flip) Method

The original hand flip is an old method of making nigiri sushi. This method is the most beautiful form of making nigiri sushi. The hands literally dance, as the sushi is made and it is very entertaining to watch. The old fashion tawara, and jigami style nigiri are made with this method. Unfortunately, fewer and fewer chefs practice this form these days since it is difficult to master. There are extra steps involved, so speed and accuracy is absolutely necessary to keep the sushi from getting warm.