



Dasik

Unique Delicacy to Accompany Tea

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Dasik is a press-formed confectionery made of sesame, chestnut, mung bean flour, grain syrup and honey.

The press used for making dasik is usually made of wood or porcelain, which is engraved with a design that forms an embossed pattern on each dasik piece.



Dasik molds carved in various designs

Newcomers to Korea are often surprised at the number of people who head off toward the mountains at daybreak, an everyday scene at mountains around Seoul. The crowd grows larger as time passes.

What are they doing out and about so early in the morning? What could they be carrying in their backpacks? Such curiosity quickly turns to laughter upon learning that they are packing empty plastic bottles.

Once these early risers reach their favorite spring on a mountain slope, they fill the empty bottles with spring water, then return home lugging their heavy bounty. The people who go through such trouble to collect spring water, or *yaksu*, believe that drinking it can help keep them healthy. They think nothing about trekking regularly to their favorite spring.

Compared to people in other countries where natural water may

sometimes be unfit for consumption, Koreans take great pleasure in drinking *yaksu*. People of most regions in China and Europe either boil their drinking water or drink tea. In contrast, Koreans prefer drinking plain water instead of boiled water or some beverage.

Buddhism, which was introduced to Korea some 1,600 years ago from India, included a tea culture along with its religious practices and teachings. Tea first influenced the culinary culture of Korean royalty and later spread to the upper classes, thus creating a cultural gap between the tea-drinking elite and the masses who drank water. Unfortunately, Korea's climate proved unsuitable for tea cultivation, which made it difficult even for the elite class to enjoy tea all the time. As a result, tea became a rare delicacy. Tea was usually prepared for Buddhist ceremonies, making Buddhist temples the center of Korea's tea culture.

Tea culture in Korea flourished

during the Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392) which promoted the virtues of Buddhism. During the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910), however, tea culture declined as the ruling class adopted Confucian doctrine. Korea's tea culture eventually reached Japan, which embraced cultural influences from the outside world.

The hardships of farming not only plagued men but also women who had to look after children and prepare meals after a long day of working in the fields. The government, in light of these difficult circumstances, designated one day each month when culinary delicacies were prepared as a way to promote a healthy family life and to free women from some of their daily burden. Of these monthly celebrations, the most important included Seollal, New Year's, the first day of the first lunar month, and Chuseok, Harvest Moon Festival,

Dasik is one of the most exquisite traditional Korean foods. It is not the kind of delicacy served on a daily basis, but at special family celebrations such as hwangap (60th birthday) or weddings. It also reflects the family's prestige by indicating that the family is aware of the tradition and refinement associated with dasik.

the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month, when the harvest begins, marking the most abundant time of the year.

On these holidays, ancestors were honored with food offerings and

libations in a ceremony called *charye*, a name derived from the serving of tea, or *cha*, to ancestors. The food offerings included meat, fish, fruit and special delicacies often elaborately decorated. Rice cakes filled with honey, a rare treat, and nuts such as walnuts and pine nuts were also offered. Oftentimes, *gokcha*, a type of wine, was used instead of tea, though now wine is more often included instead of traditional tea.

As part of these rituals, dasik was served with the tea. In addition to being offered to Buddha and ancestors, tea and dasik were served to guests by the upper class.

Dasik is a patterned confectionery shaped with a wooden or porcelain press. The press is engraved with a design, which forms an embossed pattern on each dasik piece. The design would symbolize a family name, a particular purpose such as a



Dasik is embossed with designs that symbolize good health and prosperity.



Ingredients for making dasik in five different colors (above)
 Round dasik molds (right top)
 Decorating molded dasik with a flower motif (right above)



wish for long life, or a special event like *bwangap*, or 60th birthday. In families that emphasize formality, even the color of dasik is carefully chosen. The desired taste, color and texture are taken into consideration in the selection of ingredients and processing. The arrangement of dasik by color on a serving plate reflects the artistic sense of the host, and sets the tone of the celebration.

How to Prepare Dasik

Dasik is generally prepared in five colors. A variety of ingredients are used to create the five colors, which involves different processing methods.

● Yellow (Songhwa Dasik)

Songhwa, pine pollen, is hard to come by even at Korean markets these days. The pollen forms on pine trees in early summer. The pollen is collected and dried into powder.

Today, songhwa is mostly imported from North Korea. The pollen is mixed with honey or grain syrup and press-formed.

(1) Mix 2 cups of songhwa powder and 1/3 cup honey (or 2 tablespoons of grain syrup).

(2) Grease the press with sesame oil and pack the songhwa mixture in the press.

● Black (Heugimja Dasik)

Heugimja, black sesame seed, can easily be found in Korean markets and most Asian markets. Roast and grind the heugimja before mixing with grain syrup or water. Pack the mixture into the press (The mixing ratio is the same as for songhwa).

● Red and Pink (Omija Dasik or Starch Dasik)

Wash *omija* (*Maximowiczia chinensis*) and soak in cold water for

about a day to produce omija juice. Mix the juice with mung bean starch. Add honey and grain syrup and knead. Pack the mixture into the press.

● Green (Seungumcho Dasik)

The leaves of *seungumcho* (*Angelica gigas*), which grows in northern Korea, is dried and ground. Mix 2 cups of mung bean starch, 1 tablespoon of seungumcho powder, 2 tablespoons of grain syrup, 1 tablespoon of sesame oil, and 1/3 cup of honey.

○ White (Starch Dasik)

Mung bean starch is used. The procedure is the same as omija dasik. The only difference is that it does not include omija juice.

The dasik pieces are then arranged on a serving platter in a harmonious display of five colors. ■