
In this section, you'll find 101 different Japanese poems that I've collected, all about mushrooms. 100 of them are haiku, and 1 is a *tanka* (with a 5-7-5-7-7 syllable pattern). Most of the poems are pre-1900s.

And yet, the most amazing thing about these poems is how timeless and spaceless they are. Many of the haiku written in 1700s Japan could have just as easily been written in any century in the Americas, or Europe, or Africa. To a mushroom hunter wandering through the forest, there is little difference between the 21st and the 18th centuries. The joy of finding a long-sought mushroom, the bittersweet agony of a companion grabbing a delicious mushroom just seconds before you do, the appetizing aroma of mushrooms cooking on a campfire—it never changes.

This timelessness is what motivated me to translate the poetry you see below. Most are haiku, and follow the 5-7-5 syllable pattern both in Japanese and English. Translating Japanese into English with the same number of syllables was challenging, but I find the results pleasing and hope you will as well. The poems are translated “faithfully, but not literally;” there are a few times where I added words that weren't literally in the Japanese version to make the English flow better, but I've tried hard to stick to the original intent of all of the poems without inventing my own interpretations.

Some mushroom names are translated into English common names (e.g., *hatsutake* as “milkcaps”), while other translations use the *wamei* as-is (such as “*matsutake*”). I've mostly chosen the names which seemed to fit the feeling of the poem, and the syllable scheme, as closely as possible. The Japanese word *yama* (山) usually means “mountain,” but I've translated it as “forest” more often than not. This is closer to its typical meaning in literature.

To avoid having too many footnotes, the most frequently used mushroom names in these poems are defined below:

- **enoki:** velvet shank (*Flammulina filiformis*).
- **hatsutake:** milkcap (*Lactarius lividatus*).
- **matsutake:** pine mushroom (*Tricholoma matsutake*).
- **pine truffles:** *shōro* (*Rhizopogon roseolus*). Not true truffles.
- **samatsutake:** literally “early *matsutake*” (most likely *Tricholoma colossus*). Fruits as early as June/July.
- **shiitake:** *Lentinula edodes*.
- **shimeji:** *Lyophyllum shimeji*, also called *hon-shimeji* in Japanese.
- **wood ears:** *kikurage* (*Auricularia sp.*).

While collecting poetry for this collection, I found several hundred haiku about mushrooms. However, I had to limit my collection to older poetry in order to respect Japanese copyright laws. Thankfully, the Kyoto-based haiku collective **301** had a mushroom-themed haiku meet-up to write poems for this book, in addition to their invaluable assistance interpreting several of the poems. Their (noticeably modern) poems are given at the end of this chapter.

For the poets’ names, I have followed the Japanese practice of putting last names before first names; however, I occasionally use the common convention of referring to them by their first names only.

The Poems

Nara Period to Meiji Period

From the *Man'yōshū*, author unknown (~759)

The *Man'yōshū* was the first anthology of Japanese poetry, and contains more than 4,500 poems. Many of the poems' authors are unknown, but the poets whose identities are known include servants, soldiers, aristocrats, street performers, emperors, and more. The name of the current Japanese era, *Reiwa* (令和, meaning “beautiful harmony”), comes from this collection.

高松之 此峯迫尔 笠立而 盈盛有 秋香乃吉者

*Takamatsu peak¹
is carpeted with mushrooms
their caps open, tall;
and standing in crowded groups
perfumed with autumn's sweet smell*

¹ Probably refers to the modern day Takamado-yama, a mountain east of Nara.

Matsuo Bashō (1644 - 1694)

Bashō was the most famous poet of the Edo period in Japan, and has become the most well-known haiku poet in history. He was a great teacher, and mentored many haiku poets who subsequently became famous in their own right. His constant wanderings around Japan served as inspiration for his poetry, perhaps best exemplified in *The Narrow Road to the Interior* (奥の細道, *Oku no Hosomichi*), a travel diary filled with some of his most famous haiku.

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初茸や まだ日数経ぬ 秋の露

*It is still early
yet hatsutake sparkle
with the autumn dew*

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松茸や かぶれたほどは 松の形

*The matsutake
its flesh pocked with dark scratches
like a pine tree's bark*

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松茸や 知らぬ木の葉の へばり付く

*The matsutake
with stuck-on leaves of a tree
that I do not know*

茸狩や あぶなきことに 夕時雨

*I came home after
a day of mushroom hunting
then the rain began*

Kitamura Koshun (1650 - 1697)

An Edo-period haiku poet. His father, Kitamura Kigin, was a well-known haiku poet and scholar, and a teacher of Bashō's. Koshun produced one scholarly work in addition to his poems: *Squirrel's Foot Fern of the Tale of Genji* (源氏物語忍草, *Genji Monogatari Shinobugusa*), a literary digest of the famous novel *The Tale of Genji*.

面白く 湿をふくめる 菌哉

*So delightfully
the mushroom puffs up, as it
sponges up moisture*

Mukai Kyorai (1651 - 1704)

A haiku poet and close disciple of Bashō. Born to a samurai family, he excelled in the martial arts, but gave up the warrior's path at an early age to focus on poetry.

松茸や 人にとらるゝ 鼻の先

*The matsutake
that was almost my dinner
but you got there first*

Naitō Jōsō (1662 - 1704)

A haiku poet and faithful disciple of Bashō. He was born as the eldest son of Naitō Genzaemon, a samurai of the Inuyama domain in Owari, but eventually quit to devote himself to haiku poetry.

ほととぎす 確かに峰の 早松茸

*The lesser cuckoo²
sings its song up on the peak
samatsutake*

Hattori Ransetsu (1654 - 1707)

Another disciple of Bashō, Ransetsu also came from a samurai family. In his youth, he was a known delinquent, but he grew into a famous poet known for his elegant, empathetic poetry. He founded the Setsumon School of haiku poetry.

² The call of the lesser cuckoo (*Cuculus poliocephalus*) is heard in early summer, around the same time as when *samatsutake* fruit.

くち木とな おぼしめされそ 榎茸

*I am old, and yet--
flush with enoki--much more
than a rotten log*

Takarai Kikaku (1661 - 1707)

A disciple of Bashō, Kikaku was the son of a doctor who decided to become a poet. He is known for the high level of wit and wordplay in his poetry.

松の香は 花とふくなり さくら茸

*Sweet pine fills the air
and pink on the forest floor
like cherry blossoms³*

茸狩や 鼻のさきなる 歌がるた

*We fight to be first
to spot and grab the mushrooms
uta-garuta⁴*

³ Even though the Japanese here says *sakuratake* ("cherry mushroom"), which generally refers to *Mycena pura*, it is more likely that this instance refers to the wine-colored, edible *sakura-shimeji* (*Hygrophorus russula*).

⁴ A literary card game where players compete to find and grab certain cards as quickly as possible.

Hirose Izen (1688 (?) - 1711)

Born as the third son of a sake brewer, Izen was adopted by a merchant family at the age of 14. He started a family, but left them to join the Buddhist priesthood at the age of 39. Two years later, he met Bashō—just returned from his *Oku no Hosomichi* journey—and became his disciple. Izen's poetry is notable for its casual tone and frequent use of onomatopoeia.

松茸や 宮古にちかき 山の形

*The matsutake
in the shape of a mountain
near the capital⁵*

Morikawa Kyoriku (1656 - 1715)

Kyoriku was a samurai of the Hikone clan, a renowned painter, and a disciple of Bashō. He met Bashō two years before the latter died, and gave Bashō lessons in painting while learning haiku composition from him. A man of many talents, Kyoriku was also known to be proficient in fighting with swords and spears, the equestrian arts, and the composition of Chinese poetry.

⁵ Kyoto.

茸狩や 山よりわめく 台所

*Hunting for mushrooms
the forest's cacophony
will fill my kitchen*

Yamaguchi Sodō (1642 - 1716)

Sodō was born into a sake brewing family, but left the business to his younger brother to pursue a career in poetry. He studied Chinese and Japanese poetry, calligraphy, and the tea ceremony in Kyoto, and exchanged poems with Kitamura Kigin. In 1675, he met Bashō, and though he did not become his disciple, they had a friendly relationship as colleagues, and frequently corresponded until Bashō's death.

松茸や ひとつ見付し 闇の星

*Matsutake hunt
I found but one, a shining
star in the darkness*

茸狩や 見付けぬさきの おもしろさ

*Ah, mushroom hunting
the elation of that which
you've still yet to find*

Kagami Shikō (1665 - 1731)

After losing his father at a young age, Shikō entered the Buddhist priesthood, but left the temple and became a secular priest at the age of 19. He met Bashō in his 20s and became his disciple, traveling extensively with him until Bashō's death. Shikō's own disciple, Kaga-no-Chiyojo, was an extremely influential haiku poet as well.

松茸の 山かきわくる 匂ひかな

*The matsutake
are somewhere within this brush
their fragrance guides me*

初茸に まぎるゝ庵や 松の中

*A quiet cabin;
hunting milkcaps, I was soon
lost among the pines*

Kumotsu Suikoku (1682 - 1734)

Heir to the Iseya metalworking shop in Edo, at the age of thirty Suikoku bought out the contract of a high-ranking courtesan to marry her. He then retired and devoted himself to haiku poetry.

初茸や ひとつにゑくぼ ひとつづつ

*The hatsutake
with their cute, little dimples
just one per mushroom*

Kuroyanagi Shōha (1727 - 1772)

The Kyoto-born son of a merchant, Shōha studied Chinese poetry under the master Ryū Sōro, but eventually turned his attentions to haiku. He became a disciple of the famous poet Buson. His literary style was influenced by the haiku of Mukai Kyorai and others.

唐櫃の 北山戻る きのかかな

*Up Kitayama⁶
he hauls the chest,⁷ but turns back
to pick some mushrooms*

さし上げて 獲物見せけり 菌狩

*Sharing gourmet finds
and showing off rarities
we hunt for mushrooms*

⁶ Probably refers to Mount Kitayama, on the north side of Kyoto.

⁷ Literally *karahitsu* or *karabitsu*, a large, rectangular-lidded chest used to store clothing, personal items, or Buddhist scrolls.