

Chef's Corner: Sesame-Encrusted Blackfin Tuna Bites

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Waste not, want not – this tasty Tuna-tizer epitomizes the art of effectively and efficiently processing fish and game with optimal usage and minimal waste!



Trash to Treasure: Fresh-caught Sesame-encrusted Blackfin Tuna Seared RARE with Pickled Ginger and Wasabi.

Waste not, want not is an ongoing theme as we explore the ethical utilization of all edible morsels from the fruits of our catch or harvest. Tuna is no exception!

Most tuna recipes are centered around delicate tuna loins and steaks (*Akami*). While we certainly love these premium “meat cuts,” this month’s recipe pays homage to all the “trimmings” discarded by modern fish mongers and harbor fillet services but savored as expensive delicacies in Japanese Cuisine! I want us to savor these delicacies as well!

These overlooked cuts include:

The “end-trimmings,” which are typically taken from the top and bottom ends of the loin fillets. These ends are trimmed to get uniform loins and steaks.

Cheek, head, and neck trimmings are the result of carefully removed fillets behind and under the back of the tuna’s head, cheek, and the gill plate. These are high-dollar cuts in Japan and well worth the extra time and effort to harvest!

Belly meat is sliced away from the loins after skinning and is rich in flavor and buttery fat so revered by top Asian chefs. We sometimes reserve the belly meat for blackened tuna bites, but it works well here too and is sweet and delicious!

I hope you enjoy this recipe, learn a little Japanese along the way, and are encouraged to take some extra time to optimally process that next Tuna catch – or any catch for that matter!



G-Man battling a citation Blackfin!



Mate Tim Gaffing a citation Blackfin!



Author with the "Dinner Tuna!"

Sesame-Encrusted Blackfin Tuna Sashimi

Ingredients:

- 1 pound of Blackfin Tuna "trimmings" (Noten; Harakami; Hoho-Niku, etc.)
- ¼ cup of sesame seeds (can use white, black, or combine both)
- Sea Salt to taste (I also used Himalayan salt and it was great!)
- Fresh ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon finely ground coriander seeds (optional)
- Garlic powder to taste (optional – I'm a garlic lover!)
- Light sprinkle of ground cayenne pepper (optional if you want heat)
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons oil (bacon grease, olive oil, canola oil, etc.)



Sliced Harakami, or Tuna Belly.

Condiments:

- Pickled ginger
- Wasabi paste
- Wasabi sauce (optional)
- Toothpicks – one per Sashimi bite
- Fresh parsley and spring onion for garnish



Sashimi Condiments.

Directions:

Step 1: Head to the Gulf Stream and catch some Tuna! (or buy some fresh tuna from the local fish monger). The Tuna featured here were caught on the Good Times out of Hatteras Harbor, NC.

Captain Andy Piland and the Good Times Crew diligently get ice on the fish immediately after the catch to chill the fish and preserve the quality of the meat – a must-do part of the overall process, and they do it right and with due pride!

At the dock, ice the fish in a pre-chilled cooler in a cold slurry until well "firmed-up" and ready to fillet. Must keep the Tuna ice-cold! Avoid throwing fish into a hot cooler that was in the truck all day – pre-ice it so it's cold when you return!

If you choose, portion the tuna and freeze at -4 degrees Fahrenheit for up to a week before thawing and preparing. I like my sashimi fresh off the fish, but provided it is cared for properly when frozen, most of the quality will be retained.

Step 2: Prepare the Tuna for Sashimi!

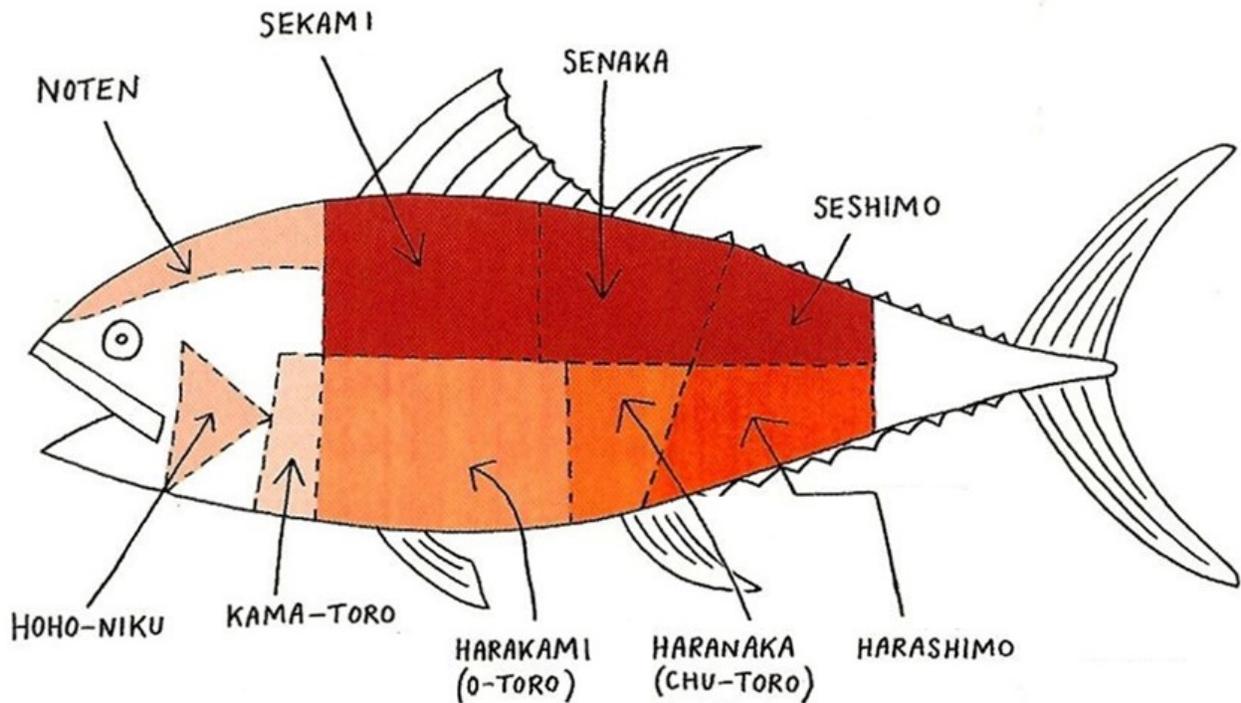
Carefully fillet the Tuna and separate the loins. Remove all skin and dark red blood lines from the Tuna loins. Trim 3-4 inches from each end, and trim-out and save the belly meat (Harakami) to create uniform loins for cutting your Tuna steaks. Then, go back to the carcass and carefully remove the rich meat from behind the head and around the gill plates and cheek (Noten, Hoho-Niku, & Kama-Toro). This is some of the best meat on the fish, and too many folks discard these delicacies with the carcass. The belly meat and trimmings make outstanding Sashimi and/or Blackened Tuna bites among other dishes!

If not grilling or using the fresh loin steaks, vacuum-seal and freeze immediately, and reserve the trimmed ends and trimmings for the Sashimi or Blackened Tuna bites – you’ll be glad you did!



Fresh Tuna steaks right off the Boat!

TIP: When freezing Tuna steaks, you can get a better seal and avoid damaging the delicate steaks by placing each steak on a wax paper-lined cookie sheet and “firming-up” the steaks in the freezer for 30-45 minutes *before* vacuum-sealing.



Tuna Processing Diagram Illustrating the Many Different Cuts of Meat (see Key below for term descriptions).

KEY:

- **Noten:** top of head – delicacy!
- **Sekami:** medium quality Akami
- **Senaka:** highest quality Akami
- **Seshimo:** lowest quality Akami
- **Hoho-Niku:** cheek meat
- **Kama-Toro:** back cheek meat
- **Harakami:** extra fatty Tuna
- **Haranaka:** fatty Tuna – wow!
- **Harashimo:** lowest quality (used as filling for sushi rolls)

NOTE: Noten, Hoho, and Kama are prized cuts found only at the most rarified Japanese Restaurants! “Toro” is a delicacy and means “to melt” – the fattier it is, the better, just like we see when Tuna are graded on *Wicked Tuna*! The tail end-meat makes excellent Tuna Burgers, Tuna Casserole, Tuna Salad, and Hawaiian Tuna Jerky, so don’t waste it! I pay my respect to the fishing gods by utilizing everything and wasting nothing – and it is well worth it!

Depending on the type of taste and texture experience you're looking for, Tuna has several different options. From rich and decadent Otoro to meaty Akami, you'll find something you like when preparing Japanese cuisine with fresh Tuna.

The first part of the tuna to explore is Otoro. This is the most desirable part from the inside of the fish's belly. Because it is the fattiest part of the fish, it practically melts in your mouth with a delicious buttery appeal which lends Sashimi a sweeter taste. Because of its rich and highly sought-after nature, Otoro is more expensive than other parts of the fish – but certainly worth every penny, so be sure not waste this cut (most folks do not use it, which is an absolute sin!).

The next part of the fish to learn is Chu-Toro. This is a perfect blend of Otoro (above) and Akami (described below). Because it straddles both types of Tuna, it provides both a meaty and a fatty texture for a real celebration in your mouth. Don't expect to eat a lot of Chu-Toro when enjoying Tuna – it makes up such a small amount of the fish that it takes a whole fish to make one good serving of Chu-Toro Sashimi! So be sure to savor and enjoy with a good friend!

Finally, the most common and frequently used part of the fish is Akami. This part is meaty and red, found most often atop rice in Sashimi or in a Sushi Roll. Because this is the main part of a Tuna fish, it is much more readily available than Chu-Toro or Otoro. Given its meaty texture, Akami also makes GREAT Tuna Steaks – cooked RARE, of course!

Step 3: Prepare and Sear Sashimi

Cut trimmings into relatively uniform nuggets.

Lightly dust the Tuna with desired spices (light salt, pepper, garlic)

Moisten each piece of Tuna with soy sauce and gently roll in sesame seeds

Heat skillet on High to assure the pan will sear vice cook the sesame-encrusted Tuna (I like to do a “test sample” for ME!)

Sear Tuna in skillet until sesame seed coating is just toasted – about 1 minute on each side. Do not overcook! The Tuna must be served RARE to truly appreciate this dish.

TIP: When making several batches, be sure to reheat skillet on high heat each time and avoid overcrowding the pan!



“Trimmings” prepped and ready.



Spiced and sesame encrusted.



Hot-seared final product - RARE!

Step 4: Serve and Enjoy!

Plate and serve with garnish and condiments! This dish is an absolute winner and a Germanos Family favorite, so...

お楽しみください

(ENJOY!)

Contributed by: CHAC member John Germanos, aka “The Instinctive Chef.”

