

O-toso

In traditional homes throughout Japan, the New Year is brought in with the ritual of drinking o-toso, a medicinal tonic. Made by infusing a combination of herbs in mirin - which is rich in natural sugars, amino acids, and digestive enzymes - o-toso is considered a nutritious health drink and is believed to protect one from sickness and misfortune.

Each member of the family has his or her own special cup, which is reserved for o-toso. Holding their cups, family members pray to spend the coming year free from sickness and to gain or preserve a youthful energy. O-toso is also served to guests on the first three days of the New Year as a symbolic fortification against the uncertainties of the future.

Although o-toso herbs, generally sold in tea bags, are not available in the United States, you can create your own o-toso tonic using Mu-16 tea, which contains several of the medicinal herbs commonly used in o-toso blends. To prepare, infuse one Mu-16 tea bag in 10 ounces of mirin at room temperature for 7-8 hours, no longer. Carefully remove the tea bag. The o-toso is now ready for our New Year's toast: To your good health!