

Spam Musubi

BY TANI BELLISTON | @808HAWAIIANRECIPES

For me, Spam Musubi is more than a dish; it is a tangible piece of Asian+American history. Spam became a staple in Hawaii during World War II, introduced by the U.S. military at a time when offshore fishing restrictions created canned meat shortages. Local families ingeniously paired this American canned meat with a comforting favorite: Japanese omusubi, or rice balls. By the early 1980s, Japanese American women Barbara Funamura on Kaua'i and Mitsuko Kaneshiro in Honolulu pioneered selling the modern Spam musubi. What began as a creative necessity evolved into a beloved icon of Hawaii's mixed-plate culture, and a cherished taste of home that I now share with my own children.

Growing up on Maui, Spam Musubi was woven into the fabric of everyday life. It served as our go-to comfort meal when money was tight, our wrapped beach snack, the ultimate post-soccer game treat, and a mandatory 7-Eleven grab. I only realized how uniquely "local" it was in high school after describing it to a friend from Boston, who found the combination of Spam, rice, and seaweed baffling. Today, Spam Musubi appears on menus nationwide, and I pack it for my boys' soccer games in Utah just as it was prepared for me years ago.

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INGREDIENTS

1 can of Spam
3 cups of uncooked medium grain rice
Water (for rice)
Nori (seaweed sheets)
2 tbsp shoyu (soy sauce)

Teriyaki Sauce

2 tbsp shoyu (soy sauce)
2 tbsp brown sugar
2 tbsp Shaoxing wine (or white wine)
1 clove garlic, minced

INSTRUCTIONS

01 Rinse the rice until the water runs clear. Add water to the pot up to the first joint of your index finger. Wipe the outside of the pot dry, place it in the rice cooker, and cook (typically 20–30 minutes).

02 Cut the nori into 3-inch-wide strips and set aside.

03 Slice the Spam lengthwise into 7–10 slices (about 1/4-inch thick).

04 Fry the Spam in a pan over medium heat for 3–4 minutes per side until crispy. Pour in the teriyaki sauce and cook for 1–2 minutes, turning to coat both sides.

05 Place a nori strip shiny-side down and position the musubi mold on top. Add a scoop of cooked rice, press down firmly with the mold handle, top with a slice of Spam, and press again while lifting the mold off.

06 Moisten the ends of the nori with water and fold them over the rice and Spam to seal.

07 Serve warm, or wrap individually in plastic wrap for an on-the-go snack.