

1 The National Research Institute of Brewing compiled this guide for consumers to use as a reference when reading sake product labels and is based on knowledge acquired through research on prices and product labels.

2 A digital PDF version of the guide is available to download via the our homepage.

3 Please read the precautions on the homepage before creating guides based on the digital file.



Glossary of Sake Label Terms

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Homepage

Glossary of Sake* Label Terms

To help you discover
your favorite sake*



* Sake made exclusively from domestic rice and produced in Japan is labelled as 日本酒 *nihonshu*.

What's on the label?

① to ⑦ are compulsory by law.

The law also requires the following information to be displayed: *nama-zake* storage / drinking precautions and the use of sake made overseas.

① ABV — アルコール分
16度以上
17度未満

② Ingredients
(water is not listed) — 原材料名
米 (国産)
米こうじ (国産米)
醸造アルコール

③ Rice production location — 精米歩合 60%

④ Category
(Sake made exclusively from domestic rice and produced in Japan is labelled as 日本酒 *nihonshu*.) Another word for sake often displayed on the label is 清酒 *seishu*. — 清酒
720ml

⑤ Content by volume — 製造年月
2023.2

⑥ Name of producer or production facility — 製造者: 酒類総合研究所
広島県東広島市鏡山3-7-1

⑦ Warning about underage drinking — 二十歳未満の飲酒は法律で禁止されています

⑧ Tokutei meisho
(premium grade) (*ginjo*, *junmai*, *honjozo*, etc.)

⑨ Seimai buai
(Rice-polishing ratio) (compulsory for *tokutei meisho*)

⑩ Rice variety
When displaying ⑧ to ⑩, it must be in accordance with laws and regulations. The same applies for storage period, terms indicating superior quality, geographical indication, and organic, etc.

⑪ Production location

⑫ Terms indicating style (*genshu*, *nama-zake*, *namachozo-shu*, *ki-ippou*, *taruzake*)

⑬ Production date

*Other regulations such as for character size and labelling methods are stipulated in the law on liquor business associations and Food Labelling Act.

Sake may also have a back label. This label mainly displays product descriptions and data to be used as a reference to quality.

製品の特徴

- 酒造好適米を贅沢に使いました
- 伝統の生もとを採用、手造りにこだわりました
- 旨味に富んだ辛口本醸造酒です

原料米	山田錦	精米歩合	60%
-----	-----	------	-----

使用酵母	ぎょうかい701号
------	-----------

成分	日本酒度	+ 5
	酸度	1.6
	アミノ酸度	1.6

甘辛

甘口	やや甘口	やや辛口	辛口
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おすすめの飲み方

冷やして	室温	ぬる燗	熱燗
△	○	◎	○

Glossary of Terms Contents

Ingredients	3
Components	5
<i>Tokutei meisho</i> (premium grade)	5
Production period	7
Organic display	7
Geographical indication	7
Types or Denominations	7
Sake brewing terminology	11
Other terms	13



We compiled this glossary of often used sake labelling terms, to use as a reference when reading sake labels to help you find something to your liking.

Label terms

(Ingredients)

原料米 *Genryomai*

Rice used to make sake. As well as ordinary eating rice, various types of rice are used including a special type particularly suited to brewing called 酒造好適米 *shu-zokotekimai*.

酒造好適米 (酒米) *Shuzokotekimai (Sakamai)*

The names given to varieties of rice particularly suited to sake brewing. It is also called sake specific rice. It tends to be much larger than ordinary rice and contains a *shinpaku*. Famous varieties include YAMADANISHIKI. The recent development of new varieties all over Japan and revival of old ones is enriching the diversity of sake. Over 100 varieties are grown across Japan.

心白 *Shinpaku*

A term given to the starchy core in the rice and or its opaque white appearance. The presence of a *shinpaku* is a desirable feature of rice for sake brewing.

山田錦 *YAMADANISHIKI*

Representative variety of sake specific rice grown throughout Japan. A favorite among *tojis* (brew masters) not only for its ease of brewing, but also its taste.

五百万石 *GOHYAKUMANGOKU*

A variety of sake specific rice grown mainly in the north of Japan and Niigata Prefecture.

美山錦 *MIYAMANISHIKI*

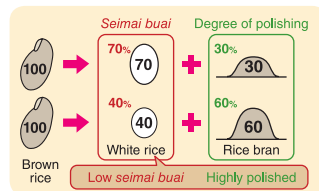
A variety of sake specific rice grown mainly in the northeast of Japan and Nagano Prefecture due to its cold resistance.

雄町 *OMACHI*

The oldest variety of sake specific rice grown mainly in Okayama Prefecture. Its unique depth of flavor has earned it a cult following.

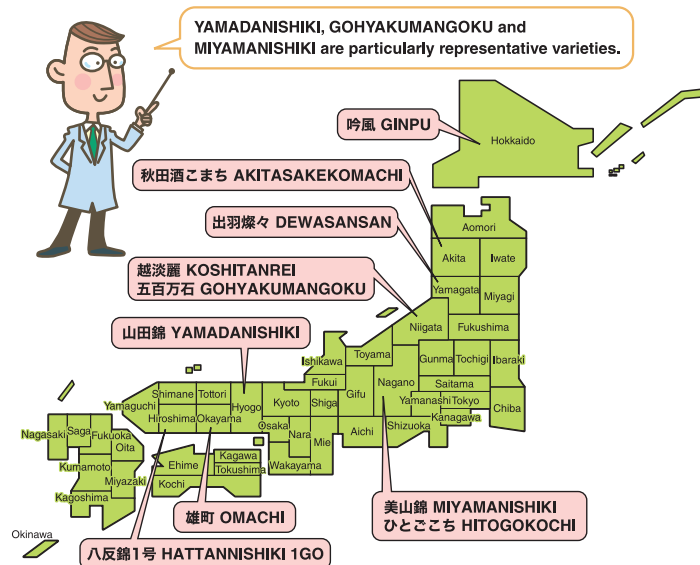
精米歩合 *Seimai buai*

A number that shows how much of each rice grain has been removed during the polishing process, expressed as a percentage of the weight of white rice relative to that of the original brown rice. It is also called the rice-polishing ratio. For example: a 40% *seimai buai* means that 100kg of brown rice was polished down to leave 40kg of white rice.



From left to right: brown rice, *seimai buai* 70%, *seimai buai* 40% white rice

Main production areas of sake rice



Source: Specifications of Agricultural Products (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries)
* Top 10 varieties by inspection volume

Q What precautions should be taken with storage after purchasing?

A Take care with temperature, light and contact with oxygen. It is recommended to keep *nama-zake*, sparkling sake, and *ginjo-shu* refrigerated. For these and all other types of sake, a dark cool place is best. Oxygen affects the quality, so after opening the bottle, close it tightly and consume as soon as possible.



麹米 Kojimai

Rice used to make the *koji*.

掛米 Kakemai

Steamed white rice that is added directly to the fermentation mash.

米こうじ(米麹) Kome koji

Steamed white rice inoculated with a mold called 麹菌 *kojikin*. *Kome koji* is also called rice *koji*. The mold secretes enzymes which break down the starch in the rice into glucose that the yeast can then eat and turn into alcohol.

**醸造アルコール Jozo arukoru**

Brewers alcohol made by fermenting sugarcane molasses or grain and then distilling. Used to adjust the flavors of sake.

Components**アルコール分 Arukoru-bun**

Amount of alcohol (ml) contained in 100ml of sake displayed with a % or the Japanese kanji 度 (*do*).

日本酒度 Nihonshu-do

A measure of the specific gravity of sake which provides an indication of how sweet or dry the sake is. A number higher than 0 indicates less residual sugar while a number lower than 0 indicates more.

酸度 San-do

A measure of how much acid the sake contains. Sake with a higher acidity will taste richer. As acidity masks sweetness, sake with a high acidity will feel drier.

アミノ酸度 Aminosan-do

A measure of how many amino acids the sake contains. More amino acids create a more robust profile, while fewer create a lighter one.

Tokutei meisho**特定名称 Tokutei meisho**

A grading system included in the Sake Manufacturing Process Quality Labeling Standards set out by National Tax Agency. Sake must fulfill certain conditions to display a grade as shown on page 10.

吟醸酒 Ginjo-shu

Sake made by slowly fermenting polished rice at low temperatures, a process called 吟醸造り *ginjo-zukuri*. In the old days, *tojis* (brew masters) would use all their skill to make *ginjo-shu* for competitions, and it was considered an art form that was rarely marketed. One of the biggest characteristics of *ginjo-shu* is its subtle, fruity aroma called 吟醸香 *ginjo-ka*. As warming highly aromatic *ginjo-shu* damages its aromas, it is often drunk chilled or at room temperature.

Nihonshu-do & 甘辛 Amakara (sweet/dry)

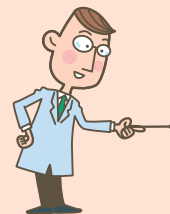
The *nihonshu-do* is a unique scale that displays the specific gravity of sake. Measured at 15°C, the *nihonshu-do* of sake weighing the same as water at 4°C is 0. Sake that is lighter reads higher than 0 (+) while sake that is heavier reads lower (-).

The specific gravity of sake varies with its components: more alcohol reduces its gravity and increases its *nihonshu-do*, while more sugar increases its gravity and decreases the *nihonshu-do*.

As the number changes with sugar levels, the *nihonshu-do* was adopted as a yardstick to measure a sake's sweetness/dryness. However, to compare the specific gravity of the sugar content of sake using the *nihonshu-do*, all sake must have the same ABV. Also, as acidity masks sweetness, when comparing sake with identical sugar content, those with higher acidity will feel drier. In other words, it is difficult to accurately measure the sweetness/dryness of sake with the *nihonshu-do* alone. In recent years, a new indicator has been proposed, which is a calculation of both sugar levels and acidity.

Measuring the nihonshu-do

A floating scale (日本酒度計 *nihonshudokei* (sake meter)) as shown in the figure on the right is floated in sake adjusted to 15°C and a reading taken. The *nihonshu-do* can also be calculated from the sake's specific gravity.



$$\text{Nihonshu-do} = (1/\text{specific gravity} - 1) \times 1443$$

純米酒 Junmai-shu

Sake made with just rice and rice *koji*. It often has both volume and umami. Due to its robustness, it can be enjoyed at a range of temperatures: from warm to chilled, on the rocks, and even mixed with hot water.

本醸造酒 Honjozo-shu

There are many types, but all have had a small amount of brewers alcohol added before pressing the fermentation mash (separating the liquid from the lees) to adjust the taste, which means that this grade is often drunk warm or hot.

Production period

As a rule, a term indicating production period such as 製造年月 *seizonengetsu* followed by the date (年 year and 月 month) the sake was packaged is displayed. Example, 製造年月X年X月.

Organic display

The Japanese words for organic, 有機 *yuki* and オーガニック *organic* can be displayed on the label if the sake meets JAS (Japanese Agricultural Standards), such as passing grading according to JAS ACT for 95% of the weight of ingredients, and by obtaining organic JAS certification. This labelling also requires the affixing of the “有機JAS” mark.

Geographical indication

A Geographical Indication (GI) is a system promoting appropriate use of a geographical origin as a shared property on labels and indicates that production area is correct and quality standards have been adhered to. For alcoholic beverages in Japan, the Director-General of the National Tax Agency designates them based on the “Labeling Standards for GI on Alcoholic Beverages” established by the National Tax Agency, and in principle, they are labeled with an indication that clearly indicates that it is a GI: 地理的表示 *chiriteki hyoji*, Geographical Indication, GI.

Types or Denominations

新酒 Shinshu

Sake made in the current brewing year (from July 1 to June 30 following year). *Shinshu* has a lovely fresh taste and aromas.

古酒 Koshu

Sake made in the previous year or even earlier. The type is smoother with mature aromas.

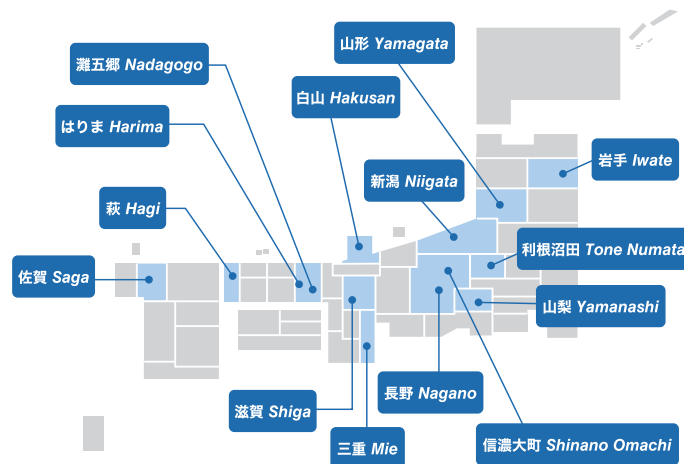
長期貯蔵酒 Chokichozoshu

Sake stored and matured for long periods. In the old days, sake was thought to be unsuitable for long-term maturation, but thanks to advances in manufacturing methods and other factors, delicious long-term matured sake is becoming more commonplace. There is a wide variety, from *ginjo-shu* types to richer types. It is sold under the names X 年貯蔵酒 *Xnenchozoshu* (Xyr matured sake), 秘蔵酒 *hizoshu*, 大古酒 *daikoshu*.

Designation status of geographical indications for sake

日本酒 Nihonshu

Only sake made exclusively from domestic rice and produced in Japan can be labelled 日本酒 *nihonshu*.



* The coloring on the map is done by prefecture and does not necessarily correspond to the area of origin.

Q

Does the production date on the label mean it is best to select the newest sake?



A No, you don't have to worry about the date that much. As with beer, unpasteurized sake labelled as 生酒 *nama-zake* should be as new as possible, but pasteurized sake should not deteriorate for 2-3 months unless storage conditions are poor.



原酒 *Genshu*

Sake that has not had water added to it after pressing. The omission of water means the sake has a higher ABV and is also richer. Cutting with water or hot water is a tasty way to enjoy it.

生酒 *Nama-zake* or *Nama-shu*

生詰め酒 *Namazume-shu*

生貯蔵酒 *Namachozo-shu*

After pressing, sake is pasteurized to halt the activity of leftover microorganisms and enzymes, a process called 火入れ *hi-ire*. Generally, there are two pasteurizations: one before storage, and one after storage before bottling. As unpasteurized sake avoids the component changes associated with heating, it has fresher flavors and aromas that are suited to drinking chilled.

生酒:unpasteurized

生詰め酒:pasteurized only once, before storage

生貯蔵酒:pasteurized only once, after storage and before bottling

貴醸酒 *Kijo-shu*

A unique syrupy, sweet sake devised at National Research Institute of Brewing. The unique thing about *kijo-shu* is that it is made by replacing some of the water that is added to the fermentation with sake. This method was partly inspired by a recipe for brewing with old sake called しおり *shiori*, which was found in the *engi-shiki* — an ancient book about laws and customs from 794-1185.

生一本 *Ki-ippou*

A *junmai-shu* that is the product of a single production facility, similar to single malt whisky.

低アルコール酒 *Tei-arukorushu*

Sake with a low ABV. Many products have been released in response to consumer preference for lighter sake. There is a wide variety available including sparkling, sweet and/or sour sake, and *nigorizake*.

樽酒 *Taruzake*

Sake with woody aromas from storage in wooden casks.

冷やおろし *Hiyaoroshi*

In the old days, sake brewed in the winter was pasteurized once and stored until the autumn to achieve a more rounded taste, an improvement called 秋上がり *akiagari*. It was then put in casks and shipped. The name *hiyaoroshi* comes from the fact it was shipped cool without any further pasteurization. As it is *namazume* and fragile, many shops refrigerate it, but many people enjoy its flavors and aromas at room temperature or lukewarm.

活性清酒(にごり酒) *Kassei seishu (nigorizake)*

A sake that is opaque and cloudy in appearance because it was lightly filtered through a coarse mesh. This type can be pasteurized to stabilize quality or released as a *nama-zake*. Fresh *kassei seishu* should be handled with care because the yeast is alive and may ferment at ambient temperatures creating CO₂ gas.

スパークリング清酒 *Supakuringu seishu*

There are mainly two ways to produce gas in sake: naturally through the activity of the yeast, and by adding carbonated gas.

Tokutei meisho (premium grade) and conditions

Tokutei meisho	Ingredients ^{1,2}	Rice-polishing ratio ³	Ratio of koji used	Typical flavors and aromas ⁴
<i>Ginjo-shu</i>	Rice, rice <i>koji</i> , brewers alcohol	60% or less	15% or more	Unique fruity aroma from <i>ginjo-zukuri</i> , pleasant appearance.
<i>Daiginjo-shu</i>	Rice, rice <i>koji</i> , brewers alcohol	50% or less	15% or more	Unique fruity aroma from <i>ginjo-zukuri</i> , pleasant appearance.
<i>Junmai-shu</i>	Rice, rice <i>koji</i>	—	15% or more	Pleasant flavors, aromas, appearance.
<i>Junmai ginjo-shu</i>	Rice, rice <i>koji</i>	60% or less	15% or more	Unique fruity aroma from <i>ginjo-zukuri</i> , pleasant appearance.
<i>Junmai daiginjo-shu</i>	Rice, rice <i>koji</i>	50% or less	15% or more	Unique fruity aroma from <i>ginjo-zukuri</i> , and particularly pleasant appearance.
<i>Tokubetsu junmai-shu</i>	Rice, rice <i>koji</i>	60% or less or use of a special technique	15% or more	Pleasant flavors, aromas, appearance.
<i>Honjozo-shu</i>	Rice, rice <i>koji</i> , brewers alcohol	70% or less	15% or more	Pleasant flavors, aromas, appearance.
<i>Tokubetsu honjozo-shu</i>	Rice, rice <i>koji</i> , brewers alcohol	60% or less or use of a special technique	15% or more	Pleasant flavors, aromas, appearance.

^{*1} Must be made with rice that passed an inspection grade 3 or higher or equivalent quality.

^{*2} Amount of brewers alcohol must not exceed 10% of the weight of polished rice.

^{*3} When displaying a grade on the label, rice-polishing ratio must also be displayed.

^{*4} While *ginjo-zukuri* lacks a clear definition, it generally refers to a brewing process which ferments highly polished rice at low temperatures to create unique aromas.

Q

Why is brewers alcohol used as a raw ingredient?



A Brewers alcohol is generally added to balance flavors and aromas, to enhance aromas and create a lighter sake. Alcohol-added *ginjo-shu* is well known for having enhanced aromas.



Sake brewing terminology

酵母 *Kobo*

The generic name given to the *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* strain of yeast and related fungi which produce alcohol from sugar. It is a milky, oval-shaped fungus about the size of a red blood cell in the human body (5-10 µm). In the food industry, such as in the production of alcohol and bread, strains with properties suited to each have been selected or improved over a long history of use. The yeast used in sake brewing is called 清酒酵母 *seishu kobo*.

家(蔵) 付き酵母 *le (kura) tsuki kobo*

An ambient sake yeast inhabiting the sake brewery. In the old days, this yeast naturally reproduced inside the *shubo* (starter), so its quality was often directly connected to the quality of the sake. Nowadays, it is common to isolate yeast from famous breweries or to use superior yeast bred by researchers, and some breweries even isolate and preserve their own to use.

きょうかい酵母 *Kyokai kobo*

Yeast which the Brewing Society of Japan distributes. When distribution began in the 1868-1912, breweries who were not blessed with good *le (kura) tsuki kobo* saw a significant improvement in sake quality.

酒母 *Shubo*

Sometimes called 酏 *moto*, the purpose of this starter is to grow the yeast into a healthy population. The starter is made from steamed white rice, rice *koji*, water, and yeast (often added). The starter is made very acidic (conventionally by adding lactic acid), because almost all bacteria and microbes are weak to acid. Only the yeast which is strong to acid can grow.

生酏 *Kimoto*

A traditional starter-making method. Requiring both labor and time, in this starter, lactic acid produced by lactic acid bacteria that grow inside the tank keeps other wild bacteria and microbes at bay while the yeast grows. Yeast cultured this way is robust and often creates dry sake with lots of flavors.

山廃酏 *Yamahaimoto*

Developed in 1868-1912 at National Research Institute of Brewing, it is an upgrade of *kimoto*. With higher polished rice dissolving more easier, the most laborious stage of *kimoto* called 山卸 *yamaoroshi* could be abolished.

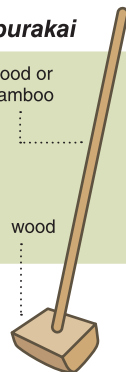
What is 山卸 *yamaoroshi*?

The first stage of *kimoto* is to divide up the mixture of steamed white rice, rice *koji*, and water into 6-8 shallow tubs called 半切り桶 *hangiri-oke*. Next, the mixture is naturally cooled, and occasionally mixed. Then, about 15-20 hours since building the starter, teams of 2-3 brewers use a long wooden pole called かぶら糺 *kaburakai* to grind the mixture about 3 times every 3 hours until the water-soaked rice becomes a smooth paste. This grinding is called 山卸 *yamaoroshi* or 酏摺り *motosuri*, and it was a very tiring task for brewers because it required a lot of patience and hard labor often in the late, cold hours.

kaburakai

wood or
bamboo

wood



速醸酏 *Sokujomoto*

The most popular conventional starter method which was devised at National Research Institute of Brewing. Due to the addition of lactic acid before the yeast, the method is faster than *kimoto* and *yamahaimoto*.

もろみ *Moromi*

The fermentation mash containing the starter, steamed white rice, rice *koji*, and water. The process of adding the ingredients to the tank is called 仕込み *shikomi*. Inside the tank, saccharification of steamed white rice by *koji* enzymes and alcohol fermentation by yeast takes place simultaneously, a cycle called multiple parallel fermentation. After around 20 days of fermentation, it becomes sake.

粕歩合 *Kasubuai*

Indicates the amount of 粕 *kasu* (lees) remaining from the mash after fermentation and pressing as a weight ratio of lees to mass of rice used. For example, a 100kg batch of rice that leaves 25kg lees after pressing has a 25% *kasubuai*. The *kasubuai* for most sake is generally 30% or less, but for *daiginjo-shu* it can be 50-60%.

滓下げ *Orisage*

Brewers use persimmon juice to make the proteins sink to the bottom and rack them off, a process called 滓下げ *orisage*. During storage, proteins dissolved in the sake change and become insoluble making the sake cloudy.

Other terms

活性炭 *Kasseitan*

Powdered active carbon that brewers add to stabilize the quality of sake. Generally, brewers disperse a small amount in the sake to absorb off-flavors, etc. before filtering. However, as it can be a way of imparting individuality, each brewery has its own unique way of using it.

あらばしり *Arabashiri*

The first pressing of sake. The next is called 中垂れ *nakadare* and the final pressing is called 責め *seme*. Freshly pressed sake contains a little CO₂ gas, and a rich fruity aroma produced by the yeast during fermentation and the aroma of rice *koji*.

鑑評会 *Kanpyokai*

Conducted by a public organization for the purpose of improving the skills of brewers. Following a judging by experts, feedback is shared to the producers and superior quality sake is announced as 金賞酒 *kinshoshu* (gold-award winning sake).

全国新酒鑑評会 *Zenkoku shinshu kanpyokai*

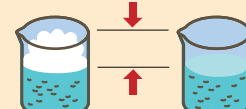
A sake competition co-sponsored by the Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association and National Research Institute of Brewing with a focus on *ginjo-shu* made during the current brewing year. Every year since it began in 1911, breweries enter many sake to try and win gold.

Main *kyokai kobo* (for sake) types and characteristics

Types		Characteristics
Foaming	Non Foaming	
No.6	No.601	Robust fermenter with modest aroma, suitable for light sake.
No.7	No.701	Gorgeous aroma suitable for both <i>ginjo-shu</i> and regular sake.
No.9	No.901	Short fermentation yielding a pronounced fruity aroma.
No.10	No.1001	Long low temp fermentation yielding pronounced fruity aroma with low acidity.
No.11	No.1101	Yields sake with clean finish and few amino acids, even in long fermentations.
No.14	No.1401	(金沢酵母 <i>Kanazawa kobo</i>) Low acidity. Suitable for making premium grades of sake through a low temp medium-length fermentation.
—	No.1501	(秋田流 <i>Akityaru</i> / 花酵母AK-1 <i>Hana kobo</i> (AK-1)) Suitable for making premium grades sake with pronounced fruity aroma and low acidity through a low temp long fermentation.
—	No.1801	Gorgeous aroma and mild taste.
—	No.1901	Yields sake with suppressed ethyl caproate aromas, slightly higher acidity but richer than with No.1801.
—	mde-D1	It is possible to suppress the stale smell component DMTS (Dimethyl Trisulfide) that forms during storage.



This space can be filled with ingredients.



A normal sake yeast fermentation mash

An *awanashi kobo* fermentation mash

泡なし酵母 *Awanashi kobo*

From about day 4 to day 10 of the fermentation, sake yeast covers the fermentation mash in a layer of foam. *Awanashi kobo* is a yeast that was modified to not produce this foam. The absence of foam has several advantages. Firstly, the tank requires less cleaning. Secondly, with no risk of the tank overflowing due to the foam, the tank can be filled to the top which means the same tank yields more sake. *Awanashi kobo* was developed and realized at National Research Institute of Brewing.