

Wagashi: Traditional Japanese Confections



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Kingyoku-kan

One of the distinguishing features of *wagashi* is the delicate sense of seasons incorporated in these confections. During the hot, humid summer months, *wagashi* makers summon their skills to create sweets that convey coolness. Among the most favored examples are the jellied confections known by such names as *kingyoku-kan*—elegant treats that invite the eye with their liquid gleam and delight the tongue with their slippery-smooth consistency.

The basic ingredient is agar, or *kanten*, a tasteless substance made from algae. Taking advantage of the substance's transparency, confectioners fashion tiny scenes of goldfish, sweetfish, green maple leaves, stars, and other natural objects associated with summer—carefully crafted from sweet bean paste (*an*) or jellied bean paste (*yokan*)—floating in cool water or a clear sky. Appealing to the eye as well as to the palate, these creations masterfully evoke the charm of summertime in Japan.