

Obento a tasty tradition!

It's lunchtime at school and you're heading for the _____, but what will you have to eat? Will you have a sandwich and an apple, or maybe a hot meal? Things are a little _____ in Japan. Children open their lunchboxes to find rice shaped like footballs, eggs that _____ like rabbits or flower-shaped carrots all packed up in an obento!

An obento, or bento, is one of the oldest food traditions in Japan. Basically, it is lunch served in a box. Obento boxes have been part of the Japanese _____ since the 5th century when people used to take a packed lunch with them to work. Bentos have become very popular since then and you can buy them almost anywhere _____ at theatres, airports and even at train stations.

An obento usually _____ of four parts rice, three parts meat or fish (fried or grilled), two parts vegetables (pickled, boiled or steamed) and one part fruit. It should be nourishing and _____, but it must be appealing too. You often see food shaped like flowers, animals and sometimes even cartoon characters! Mothers take great _____ in creating 'school-bentos' for their children.

Nursery schools have _____ regulations for an obento. Food should be easy to eat with chopsticks or the fingers, portions should be small and it should be pleasing to the eye. It should also _____ food that the child would not normally eat so that they won't become a fussy eater.

The Japanese have always looked upon the mother as one of the main _____ of a child's success. Taking time to prepare their children's food shows their love for them.

And what happens if a Japanese mum _____ out of ideas? There are almost 400 magazines available to get inspired.