

On the English-language Etymology of "green vegetable soybeans," "edamamé," "vegetable-type soybeans," and "food-grade soybeans"

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No other soyfood has had so much difficulty in finding a single, standardized name. To this day, soybeans picked when still fresh and green in the pods, boiled or steamed, and served like a vegetable, are called by a bewildering variety of names: *edamamé* (pronounced ay-duh-MAH-may, the Japanese name), fresh green soybeans, vegetable soybeans, green soybeans, edible green soybeans, green vegetable soybeans, immature green soybeans, green immature soybeans, immature soybeans, garden soybeans, garden-type soybeans, garden soys, branch-beans, etc. The short names are all ambiguous and the precise names are all too long. Fortunately, since the late 1990s, the media have increasingly used one name: edamame.

The first attempt to describe green vegetable soybeans appeared on 12 April 1855 when T.V.P. [T.V. Peticolas] of Mount Carmel, Ohio, writing in the *Country Gentleman* said: "They are inconvenient to use green, being so difficult to hull." For the next few decades other writers followed this pattern of describing rather than naming the tender green beans. In Dec. 1890 C.C. Georgeson, writing in the *Kansas Agric. Exp. Station Bulletin* first used the term "Edamame" in an English-language publication to describe his seeds imported from Japan; but he was using the word as the name of a soybean variety, rather than as the name of a food type.

It wasn't until Jan. 1915 that a real name for these tender fresh beans first appeared—in the *USDA Bureau of Plant Industry, Inventory* No. 33. Referring to Plant Introduction No. 34702, from Shantung Province, China, Dr. William R. Faries of Coachella, California, wrote that he had received the seeds in December 1912. They "grow well here. They are fine for green shelled beans."

On 19 May 1917 Anna R. Van Meter, writing in the *Ohio Farmer*, called them "Green Soybeans." The only problem was that dry soybeans with green seed-coats are called by the same name.

In July 1918 William J. Morse, wrote in the *USDA Farmers' Bulletin* No. 973 about this "green-vegetable bean."

The name we prefer was coined by William Morse while studying soybeans in Japan. In July 1929 he first called them "Vegetable soybeans," then in Jan. 1931 he started using the term "Green vegetable soybean," and finally in March 1932 "green vegetable soybeans" (our preference). Morse made a major effort to introduce both the new varieties and the new way of eating them to America.

During the 1930s, six new terms were introduced: "green shelled soybeans" (USDA Bureau of Home Economics, 1933), "fresh green soybeans" (Carey Miller of Hawaii, 1933), "green immature soybeans" (Carey Miller and Ruth Robbins, 1934), "shell soy beans" (Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, letter of 9 Dec. 1935 to William Morse), "immature green soybeans" (Dr. A.A. Horvath 1938), and "immature garden soy beans" (Helen Parsons, Abby Marlatt, and George M. Briggs, 1939).

The name "Green vegetable soybeans" first appeared in the title of a publication in 1935; it was an article by Morse in the *Proceedings of the American Soybean Association* (p. 44-45). In the same article he began to search for terms to describe the new *type* of large-seeded Japanese soybeans from which the best edamamé are grown: Being unaware of the word edamamé, he coined the terms "vegetable types" and "green vegetable types." In 1938 he began to call them "edible soybeans."

But the name that stuck was first appeared in March 1939 in a famous bulletin titled "Eighteen varieties of edible soybeans," by J.W. Lloyd and W.L. Burlison of the Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station. They called them "vegetable-type soybeans" and distinguished them from typical "field-type soybeans."

Other terms used to refer to regular soybeans include "grain type" (Deodhar et al., 1973), "oil beans" (Liu et al., 1995), and "commodity soybeans" (Poysa, 1999).

During the 1930s and 1940s William Morse did more than any other person to try to introduce green vegetable soybeans and "edible- or vegetable-type" soybeans to America as a new food and to popularize their use. He wrote and lectured widely about them, and therefore he thought a great deal about what name would best describe them. He was in a unique position to see the big picture in terms of soybean terminology, and by the 1940s he had clearly settled on the terms "green vegetable soybeans" and "edible types" as those he preferred.

After 1940 only a few new names appeared: "Garden soys" (Edward Dies, 1942), "garden-type soybeans" (Allan K. Smith, 1959), and "branch-beans" (a literal English translation of the Japanese name *edamamé*) (*Organic Gardening and Farming*, July 1977).

Then in the late 1990s a new name burst upon the scene: "edamame," the Japanese word for green vegetable soybeans cooked and served in the pods. This name was first used in an English-language document, as far as we can tell, in 1991, by the Jameson-Williams Co. of Fairmont, Michigan. The company issued a 2-page leaflet titled "What is edamame?" By the late 1990s and early 21st century food writers and manufacturers were using the word "edamame" for all kinds of green vegetable soybeans, including shelled ones that would never be called "edamame" in Japan.

Today, most people using the term "edamame" don't realize that they are using it to mean "green vegetable soybeans" and that the word "edamamé" has long been used to refer to a subcategory of green vegetable soybeans—namely those that are cooked and served in the pods. Moreover, many do not understand the important connection between "vegetable-type soybeans" and "green vegetable soybeans." This is unfortunate.

After studying these terminology questions for more than 25 years, Soyfoods Center would like to see the following terms adopted: (1) Green vegetable soybeans: Vegetable-type soybeans picked green and cooked until tender. They may be served either in the pods (as edamamé) or shelled. This term has a 50-year history of use in the professional literature. (2) Edamamé: Green vegetable soybeans sold, cooked, and served in the pods. For shelled green vegetable soybeans we favor the term "shelled edamamé." In Japan, the latter are just starting to become available in the produce section of grocery stores, sold refrigerated (not frozen), typically in rigid containers with clear plastic tops and called either *mukimi edamamé* or *edamamé no mukimi* or *mukimame*. *Mukimi* means "shelled" and *mukimame* means "shelled beans." (3) Vegetable-type soybeans: Certain varieties of large-seeded soybeans (most with Japanese pedigrees and clear hilums) recognized for their good flavor and texture when used as food—either as green vegetable soybeans or tofu, soymilk, etc. This term has a 50-year history of use in the professional literature. In Japan, such seeds are called *edamamé no tane* ("edamame seeds"). They are widely

available in Japan in the spring in typical paper seed packets at grocery stores next to the produce department or the cut-flower department.

An alternative, simpler approach (now used by the American media) would be to call both (1) and (2) above "edamame" then to call the shelled ones "shelled edamame."

Unfortunately each of these three approaches and terms has its disadvantages. (1) Green vegetable soybeans is a very descriptive term, but it is quite long and unfamiliar to most Americans. Since "shelled green vegetable soybeans" is much too long, "shelled edamame" (a term now starting to be used in Japan) or "green shelled soybeans" might be better. (2) Edamame is nice and short, and widely used in the American press since the late 1990s. But it is difficult for English speakers pronounce correctly if there is no accent on the last letter, yet no English words have accents, and the keyboard character (é) only exists in special foreign-language character sets, which are a nuisance to use frequently. (3) The term "vegetable-type soybeans" is easy to confuse with "green vegetable soybeans." Moreover, the term sounds strange when used to describe large-seeded (often clear hilum) soybean varieties preferred for making tofu or soymilk. In addition, most American's have never heard of "vegetable-type soybeans." The term "food-grade soybeans," widely used in Canada since the 1980s, has its own problems. First, it is often to refer to all soybean varieties used to make foods, including small-seed varieties used to make natto and soy sprouts. Second, all soybeans can be considered "food grade."