What is Wasabi?

Wasabi is that pale green condiment that sometimes comes with sushi. Wasabi flavor has been compared to mustard or horseradish—indeed wasabi is sometimes called Japanese horseradish—but the flavor and smell of real fresh wasabi are unique. It is a wonderful condiment or spice and has many other uses as well.

Forget what your dictionary says, the Japanese pronunciation is wä′-sä′-bē, that is accent on both the first and second syllables.

The wasabi plant (wasabia Japonica or Eutrema wasabi) is native to certain areas of Japan, where it grows in or near cool mountain streams. It is cultivated in Japan and several other parts of the world including the Pacific Northwest of the USA and Canada. To make the condiment paste, a wasabi rhizome (above-ground root stem) is ground or grated with a very fine grater, preferably a few minutes before use.

An excellent essay on wasabi by food expert Elizabeth Andoh, reprinted from Mangajin, is in http://www.mangajin.com/mangajin/samplemj/Wasabi/wasabi.htm.

But most sushi bars in America, and indeed also in Japan, serve imitation wasabi because the real thing is difficult to grow and expensive. Imitation wasabi, “wasabi wannabe” as we call it, is usually made from horseradish, mustard, and food coloring, often as a powder to be mixed with water to make a paste. Real wasabi loses its flavor if dried, so even if the powder claims to contain some real wasabi, you won’t taste it.

Some approximation to fresh wasabi is available in a squeeze tube containing real wasabi. But imitation wasabi is also available (for less money) in a squeeze tube—read the label carefully!
From left to right in this picture: (1) powder containing some wasabi but no wasabi flavor, then four squeeze tubes: (2) more wasabi than horseradish (but water first ingredient), (3) more wasabi than horseradish (wasabi first ingredient), (4) mostly wasabi, and (5) mostly wasabi.

Following is a list of growers of fresh wasabi in North America. All these growers are willing to ship fresh wasabi rhizomes in commercial quantities intended for restaurants and markets.

Attn: Mr. Roy Carver
Pacific Farms 800-927-2248
88420 Highway 101 North http://www.freshwasabi.com/
Florence, OR 97439

Attn: Shih Ting Lin
Stone Lin Wasabi Farm 604-513-0031
8520 204th Street
Langley, BC V2Y 2C2
Canada

Attn: Ms. Patty Johnson
Olympic Mountain Evergreen Farm 360-426-6543
2933 West Skokomish Valley Road
Shelton, WA 98584
Attn: Dr. Brian Oates, President
Pacific Coast Wasabi Ltd. 604-682-4577
450 – 1050 Alberni Street http://www.wasabia.ca/
Vancouver, BC V6E 1A3
Canada

Attn: Mr. Jones
The Frogfarm 206-361-1981
3408 NE 193rd Street http://www.wasabifarm.com/
Seattle, WA 98155

The following companies import wasabi and wasabi products from Japan to North America.

Attn: Kaori Yazawa
Southern Tsunami
AFC Corporation 310-604-3200
19205 South Laurel Park Road http://www.afcsushi.com/
Rancho Dominguez, CA 90220

(Division of International Marine Products)
1021 South Railroad Avenue
San Mateo, CA 94402

Sales & Marketing Department 800-633-1004
540 Forbes Boulevard
South San Francisco, CA 94080-2018

S&B International Corporation 310-378-0898
23430 Hawthorne Boulevard, Suite 125 http://www.sbfoods.co.jp/
Torrance, CA 90505

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