

# The Garden of Illuminated Flowers

**In Ashikaga City, Tochigi Prefecture, there is a flower garden known for the stunning wisteria that bloom there in spring. But the garden is just as popular in winter, when “illuminated flowers” bloom.**

**SATO KUMIKO**

LOCATED in Ashikaga City, in the southern part of Tochigi Prefecture, Ashikaga Flower Park has more than 350 wisteria planted on a 100,000 square-meter site. A wisteria trellis extending over some 1,000 square meters has been created to enable visitors to better appreciate the 150-year-old wisteria tree that symbolizes the garden. When in full bloom, clusters of purple blossoms hang down, sometimes as low as 1.8 meters, above the visitor’s head. The park attracted public attention in 2014 when it was voted one of the top 10 international dream destinations by the American news channel CNN for the magical quality of the wisteria flowers.

While the best time to view wisteria at Ashikaga

Flower Park is from mid-April to mid-May, the number of visitors also increases in winter, when the LED “illuminated flowers” bloom in profusion. “The garden of illuminated flowers” has been held from late October to early February every year since 2001. During this time, the park welcomes around 600,000 of its annual visitor intake of 1.6 million.

“In addition to wisteria, we plant a variety of flowering trees that bloom in each of the four seasons. Winter, though, is always a slow-moving season for flowers. Even so, some visitors would use the rest house in the park, so to make it a bit more pleasurable for them the staff displayed modest illuminations on the trees outside the window. That was the beginning of “The garden of illuminated flowers,” recalls Hayakawa Koichiro, Chief Executive Officer of Hayakawa Holdings Co. which manages the garden. This initiative was well received and gradually more illuminations were added until eventually “The



“Wisteria blossoms” are illuminated in changing shades of purple, yellow and white

“Fuji no hana [Wisteria] Story of Light”

All photos: ©Ashikaga Flower Park

garden of illuminated flowers” was opened.

Even now, all the illuminations at Ashikaga Flower Park are installed manually over a period of some five months by the garden staff at the same time as tending the trees.

“They have a thorough knowledge of how flowers become established and what colors their blossoms will be. The colors of the wisteria flowers cannot be rendered realistically using existing bulbs, so they apply shades of color by hand to each individual petal bulb,” says Hayakawa. These wisteria flower reproductions have been recognized for their unparalleled uniqueness and won first place four years running in illumination awards selected by



“Amethyst Sage Light-up”

night view appreciation experts nationwide.

Each year the illuminations adopt a theme for the enjoyment of visitors, featuring four different big wisteria trellises, 80-meter wisteria tunnels, illuminations depicting seasonal poems about natural scenery on the hillsides, and illuminations reflected on the surfaces of ponds scattered throughout the park. The highlight of this season is the wisteria



illumination “Fuji no hana story of light.” The flowering periods of the wisteria at Ashikaga Flower Park differ slightly depending on the variety. The first variety to flower are the cherry blossom color, followed by purple, white, and yellow. “Fuji no hana story of light” renders this color transition on a single trunk in a way that is only possible with illuminations.

In October 2019, the entire garden was flooded by the heavy rain of Typhoon No. 19 \*, which wreaked extensive damage across Japan. Residents of Ashikaga City are deeply moved to be able to see “The garden of illuminated flowers” once again this season. All the staff worked hard to pump out the water and recover damaged trees, and were able to turn on the lights in the “The garden of illuminated flowers” on November 2, just one week later than usual.

“Many people from the local community who came to the park to see the illuminations thanked us for restoring it to its full glory. For the staff, that was the most encouraging thing of all,” says Hayakawa.

This season, a record 5 million bulbs were illuminated, their colorful warmth lighting up the Ashikaga night. 🌸

