

An Island Overflowing with Peony Flowers



Flowering Chisen Botan peonies cover the surface of the pond at Yuushien Garden

A section of the Botan Enro garden path



Daikon Island, located in Matsue City in eastern Shimane Prefecture, is the largest production area for peony seedlings in Japan, a flower loved by people of all generations. The peony flowers on the island come into season each year from the end of April through the beginning of May and have become an important local resource for tourism.

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BOTAN (peonies), which bloom with large, brightly colored flowers, are known as the "king of flowers" and have been cherished since ancient times. A small deciduous shrub in the family *Paeoniaceae*, peonies are said to have been brought over to Japan from China as a medicinal plant in the 8th century and have been cultivated as ornamental flowers since then. Daikon Island in Matsue City, Shimane Prefecture produces the most peony seedlings in Japan. This small 12-km perimeter island is located in a brackish lake (a marshy lake where seawater and freshwater are mixed together) known as Nakaumi, and the peonies are in bloom from the end of April through the beginning of May. Particularly popular are the peonies at Yuushien Garden.

Recently, about 700,000 peony plants have been shipped from Daikon Island each year, with some being exported abroad. It was the farming women on the island who made that happen. For a decade starting in 1955



as Japan entered a period of rapid economic growth, these women traveled around Japan selling peonies and in doing so, allowed Daikon Island to grow into Japan's largest production area for the flower. Yuushien Garden was established partly because of the island women's hardship, according to Otani Toshiki, Chief of Sales and Planning at the garden.

"Kadowaki Sakae, the first director of the garden, was pained by how the children of farmers were sad at the absence of their mothers who were away from home selling peonies. Yuushien Garden was built to develop tourism on the island as a new industry that would allow the mothers to stay on the island without having to leave to sell flowers."

Yuushien Garden opened in April 1975. Occupying a large, 40,000 square meter plot of land, it is a *kaiyu*-style traditional Japanese garden which visitors enjoy by strolling along the paths around a pond. During the annual Botan Enyukai (peony garden party) held between early April and early May, visitors can enjoy the blooming flowers of about 25,000 peonies of around 250 varieties. Especially popular with visitors are the 30,000 flowers of the Chisen Botan (garden pond peonies), which float on the surface of the pond in the center of the garden during the Golden Week holiday (end of April to early May), and the Botan Enro (peony garden path), which features peony flowers spread out like a carpet on the ground. On the final two days of the garden party, all of the red, white, purple, and other colorful blossoms, which number in the thousands, are replaced with white and yellow flowers. This is known as

the Yellow Garden Festival. This is a flowering performance possible only here because the island produces the most peonies in all of Japan.

Though the scent of peony flowers is not as strong as that of roses, in spring Daikon Island is enveloped by a gently sweet aroma. The island is a very special place to enjoy all the charms of the peony. 



Flowering red peonies at Yuushien Garden