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JAPANESE SPRING

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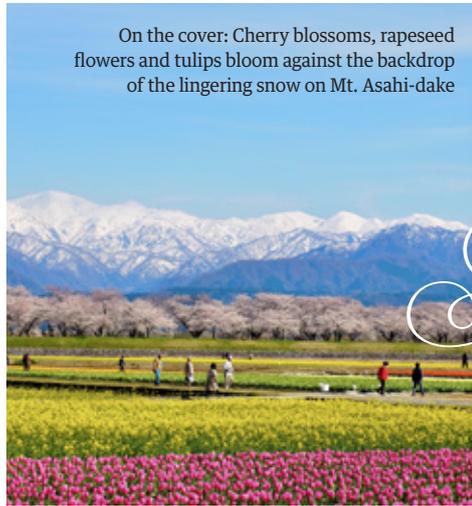
Tokyo Narita Airport terminals 1 ● JR East Travel Service Center (Tokyo Narita Airport) ● JR Tokyo Station Tourist Information Center ● Tokyo Tourist Information Center (Haneda Airport, Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building, Keisei Ueno Station) ● Niigata Airport ● Kansai Tourist Information Center (Kansai Int'l Airport) ● Fukuoka Airport Tourist Information ● Prefectural Central Libraries



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Fukuchiyama City in Kyoto Prefecture is home to a silky wisteria which is estimated to be over 1,200 years old.



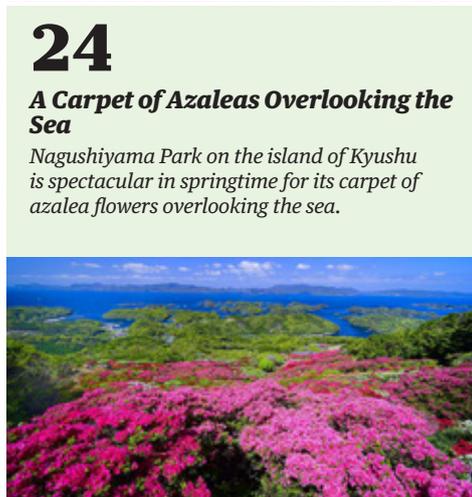
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THEME FOR **APRIL:**

THE FLOWERS THAT GIVE COLOR TO JAPANESE SPRING

Among the more than 5,000 species of flowering plants in Japan are some 1,500 endemic species—plants that are native to the Japanese archipelago. Many of these plants blossom in spring, coloring gardens, fields and mountains from north to south in their own unique ways. In this month's issue of *Highlighting Japan*, we take a look at some of these long cherished flowers, from “spring fairies” the dogtooth violets and corydalis in Japan's northernmost region, Hokkaido, to the azaleas on the southernmost main island of Kyushu.

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JAPAN CULTURAL ENVOY

Shakuhachi's Timeless Timbre Brings Rich Experience to Global Audiences

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ON THE COVER

Cherry blossoms, rapeseed flowers and tulips bloom against the backdrop of the lingering snow on Mt. Asahi-dake
Photo: Courtesy of Asahi Town Tourism Association

EDITORS' NOTE

Japanese names in this publication are written in Japanese order: family name first, personal name last.

Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan

An international exposition will be held in Osaka in 2025 under the theme “Designing Future Society for Our Lives.”

SAWAJI OSAMU

FROM April 13 to October 13, 2025, Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan (“Kansai” refers to Osaka and surrounding areas) will be held in Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture. This will be the third time an international exposition has been held in Osaka, following the Japan World Exposition Osaka 1970 and the International Garden and Greenery Exposition, Osaka, Japan, 1990. Yumeshima, an artificial island located on the waterfront in Osaka City, will be the location of the 155-hectare venue. As of March 23, 2022, a total of 87 countries and 6 international organizations have formally announced their participation

in Expo 2025.

In December 2020, the Japan Association for the 2025 World Exposition, which is in charge of preparing for and managing the Expo, announced their Master Plan. According to the Master Plan, Expo 2025 is “a national project toward a coming post-COVID-19 era.” Moreover, the Expo will “provide humankind with an opportunity to return to life as a starting point, rebuild awareness of the life of each other and take a careful look at life in diverse forms in the natural world to explore a sustainable future of the world.” It also emphasizes that “in this era, which marks a turning point in history, it will be significant for the world to come together for the Expo and take a step toward a new world beyond 2025 by sharing a vision of a future society for our lives.”

2025 is five years before the target year 2030 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United

Nations General Assembly in 2015. The Master Plan states that “[Expo 2025] will offer an ideal opportunity to confirm the interim progress of international efforts to achieve the SDGs and accelerate the efforts. At the same time, it is expected that the Expo, intended to explore a future society from a medium- to long-term perspective, will present not only a vision of a world in 2030 where the SDGs will have been achieved but also a vision of a world beyond the SDGs.”

THE EXPO’S THEME

The theme of Expo 2025 is “Designing Future Society for Our Lives.” The theme is intended to make individuals think about how they want to live and how they can maximize their potential. It is also intended to drive co-creation by the international community in designing a sustainable society that supports individuals’ ideas of how they want to live. Moreover, to elaborate further on the discussion of “life” as the central piece of the Expo’s theme, three subthemes have

Conceptual image of the venue of Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan

Credit: Japan Association for the 2025 World Exposition



also been established: “Saving Lives,” “Empowering Lives,” and “Connecting Lives.”

Furthermore, the concept of Expo 2025 is “People’s Living Lab.” Based on this concept, the Expo will endeavor to give a realistic picture of a future society not just through thought but also through action. This endeavor will begin before the Expo, by inviting diverse participants to come together with various initiatives in their respective positions and tackle challenges whose solution will help achieve the SDGs at or outside the Expo venue. Additionally, positioning the Expo venue as a laboratory where new technologies and systems will be verified, the Expo will aim to raise it as a platform that will trigger the creation of innovations by diverse players and apply those innovations to real society. As part of this, efforts will be made toward realizing Society 5.0¹, which is positioned as one of Japan’s national growth strategies.

EXPO PROJECTS

Exhibitions, events, field experiments, and other projects will be held in accordance with Expo 2025’s theme and concept. One of them is “thematic projects.” Eight leading experts, including scientists, movie directors, and artists, get together with companies and organizations to conduct these projects. Each

Map of the Kansai Region

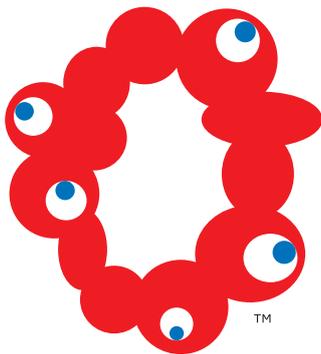


Credit: Japan Association for the 2025 World Exposition

Conceptual image of an outdoor event at the venue

Credit: Japan Association for the 2025 World Exposition





OSAKA, KANSAI, JAPAN

EXPO
2025

Concept of Logo

Thrilling sciences and technologies.
Stimulating entertainment.
Moving art and creativity.
Elements that reach
the very depths of our bodies,
and trigger excitement in each
and every one of our cells.
An embodiment of the future,
Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai,
is nearly upon us.
As our individuality comes alive,
the Expo will provide a platform for us
to gather, connect and be inspired.



Orizuru with message cards
distributed at the Japan Pavilion at
the Dubai Expo

Photo: Japan Association for the 2025 World Exposition

sending *orizuru* (origami paper cranes) to Expo 2020 Dubai that was held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where about 1,000 *orizuru* made by Co-Creation Partner members, elderly persons, and many others were wrapped in bags together with message cards and distributed at the Japan Pavilion at the Dubai Expo. This was very popular.

In preparation for 2025, diverse initiatives will be conducted as part of the TEAM EXPO 2025 program. Of these, especially excellent initiatives will be displayed and demonstrated at the venue as the Best Practices.

(For more details about Expo 2025, see <https://www.expo2025.or.jp/en/>) 

Note: This article has been created with the consent of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and on the basis of materials published by the Ministry.

Official Character Design for Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan



The official character design for Expo 2025 has been selected from 1,898 proposals. This character was born from the idea of making the logo itself into a character. The character is designed with the concept that it can change its appearance together with the water of Osaka, known as “the city of water,” so it doesn’t have a fixed shape.

expert produces the pavilion architecture, the exhibition at the pavilion, and various events according to one of eight themes, such as “Quest of Life” or “Totality of Life.”

Moreover, the TEAM EXPO 2025 programme realizes the theme of Expo 2025 and aims to have the diverse participants jointly build an ideal future society to achieve the SDGs. A feature of these projects is that they are not restricted by the Expo’s duration or venue, with many of them already having started. As of February 2022, a total of 581 projects have been registered, including 150 organizations as Co-Creation Partners and 431 projects as

Co-Creation Challenges. Co-Creation Challenges are registered as individual actions done to realize futures as envisioned by each and every person, while Co-Creation Partners are registered as corporations, organizations, and such that support the Co-Creation Challenges devised by either themselves or others. For example, there was a program for

i Society 5.0 refers to a society in which economic development and the resolution of social issues are compatible with each other through a highly integrated system of cyber space and physical space by utilizing AI (artificial intelligence), robotics, big data, and other forms of advanced technology. The concept appears in the Sixth Science, Technology, and Innovation Basic Plan adopted by the Japanese government in a Cabinet decision in 2021. <https://www8.cao.go.jp/cstp/english/index.html>

Conceptual image of the venue of
Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan

Credit: Japan Association for the 2025 World Exposition



An *ezorisu* (Hokkaido squirrel) among the *katakuri* (Japanese dogtooth violets) and *ezoengosaku* (corydalis) at Urausu Shrine
Photo: Chappy/PIXTA



Fukujuiso (Amur adonis) in flower in the Numanotaira district of Yamato Town, Kitakata City, Fukushima Prefecture
Photo: AFL0



The Flowers that Give Color to Japanese Spring



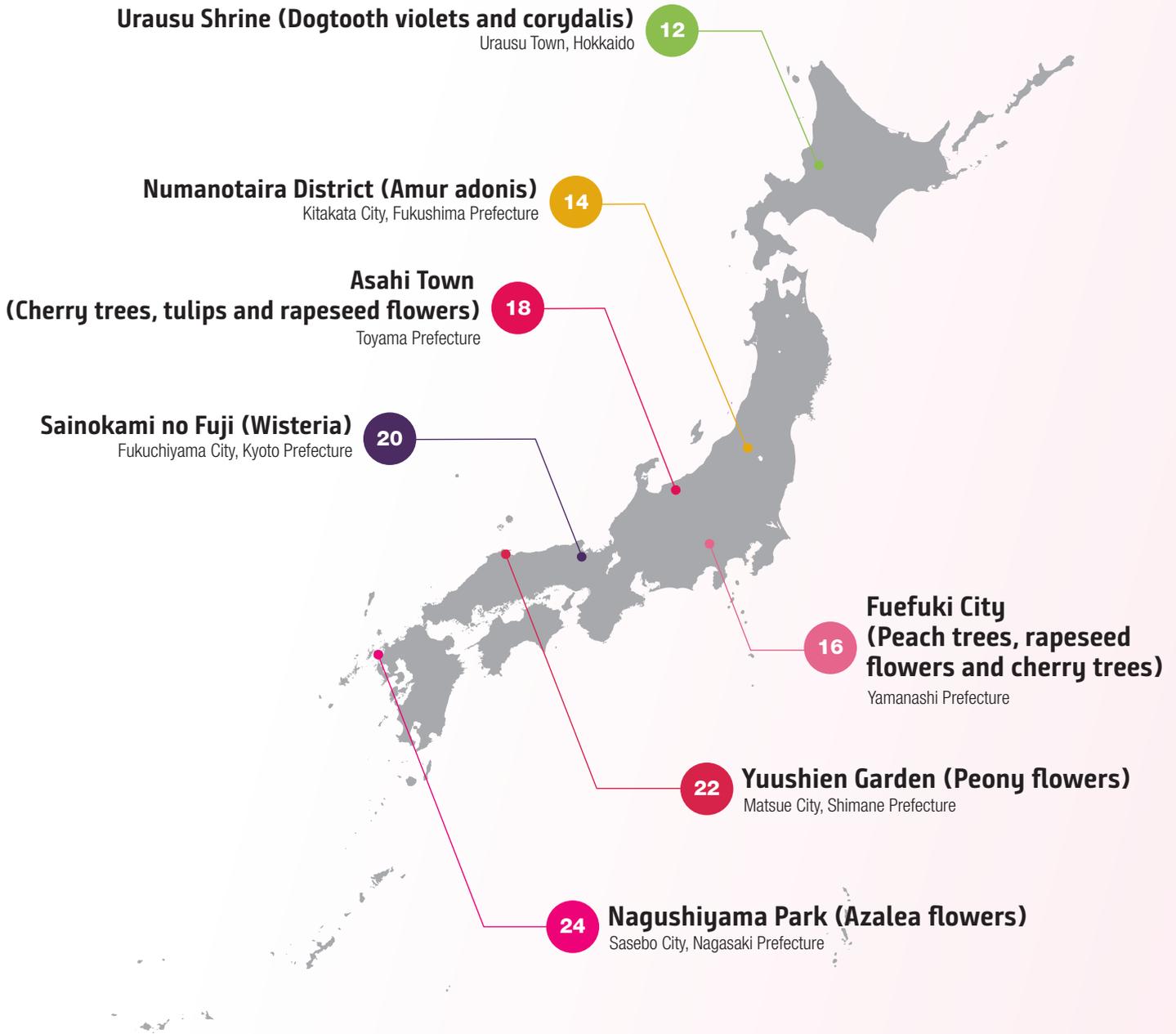
Evening view of Kita-kujukushima from the observatory at the summit
Photo: Courtesy of Nagashiyama Visitor Center



Sainokami no Fuji viewed from above
Photo: AFL0

A

mong the more than 5,000 species of flowering plants in Japan are some 1,500 endemic species—plants that are native to the Japanese archipelago. Many of these plants blossom in spring, coloring gardens, fields and mountains from north to south in their own unique ways. In this month’s issue of *Highlighting Japan*, we take a look at some of these long cherished flowers, from “spring fairies” the dogtooth violets and corydalis in Japan’s northernmost region, Hokkaido, to the azaleas on the southernmost main island of Kyushu.



The Flowers that Give Color to Japanese Spring



Tada Taeko

MANY kinds of flowers bring color to the fields and mountains of Japan in spring. We spoke with Tada Taeko, a plant ecologist who is a lecturer at Rikkyo University and other universities, about spring flowers in Japan.

In Japan, various flowers such as cherry blossoms bloom in spring, but how many types are there? Also, please tell us about their characteristics.

More than 7,400 species of land plants grow naturally in Japan. Of these, there are more than 5,000 species of flowering plants and about 1,500 kinds of endemic species that can only be found in Japan, including *fukujuso* (Amur adonis), *fuji* (wisteria), *asebi* (Japanese andromeda) and *yamazakura* (Japanese mountain cherry) that bloom in spring. Japan is one of the richest countries in terms of biological diversity including plants, and is one of the most important “hot spots” in terms of global biodiversity.

Japan is an island nation, consisting of numerous islands. In general, organisms on islands evolve independently and become species unique to that island. Among the islands of the Japanese archipelago, there are those such as the Ogasawara Islands that have never been connected to the continent, while others, such as the Ryukyu archipelago, have undergone a history of migration and isolation of organisms as a result of their transition of connection to and separation from the continent. This geohistory is also deeply related to the geographic distribution

and species differentiation of organisms unique to the Japanese archipelago.

The Japanese archipelago, which extends from north to south, has regions with various climates, from Hokkaido, which belongs to the subarctic zone (high mountain areas belong to the frigid zone), to Okinawa and the Ogasawara Islands, which belong to the subtropical zone. Some areas experience very high snowfall. The terrain is full of change, with low-elevation flatlands and mountain ranges of over 3,000 meters. In addition to this diverse climate and topography, there is abundant water to support the life of various organisms.

These organisms support each other. For example, for insect-pollinated flowers, pollinators such as bees and butterflies are important partners. Plants produce pollen and nectar, and attract insects to this food source with their flowers’ color and scent. Pollen sticks to the feeding insect’s body. When the insect flies from flower to flower, pollen sticks to the stigma and causes flowers to bear fruit and produce seeds. There are also wind-pollinated plants, but insect-pollinated plants bloom with more showy flowers because these flowers have coevolved with the pollinators. Flowers have evolved their color, shape and size to be ideally suited to pollinators. In Japan, about 70 percent of flowering plants are insect-pollinated, and their color and shape have rich variety. This is closely related to the high diversity of pollinators in Japan.

At the same time, there are places in Japan where people are deeply involved in maintaining the diversity of plants and other organisms. These are areas called *satoyama* consisting of villages, forests, farmland, reservoirs, and so forth. In *satoyama*, the growth environment with a rich biodiversity has been maintained by people’s sustainable use of nature over a long time. In *satoyama*, forest trees are cut every 20 to 30 years to be used as fuel, while fallen leaves are collected to fertilize the fields. As a result, light comes to shine on the forest ground, thus assisting the growth of various plants such as “spring ephemerals” that appear on the ground only for a short period of time in spring. There are many beautiful flowers in full bloom there in spring.

Please tell us about what plants bloom in *satoyama* in spring, other than well-known flowers such as cherry and plum blossoms.



Katakuri (Japanese dogtooth violet) flowers in *satoyama* in Niigata Prefecture

For example, there is *katakuri* (Japanese dogtooth violet). Dogtooth violet is one of the spring ephemerals. For a short period of time in spring, after sprouting, producing leaves, blooming, and making seeds, it withers and disappears almost without a trace. Only the seeds and bulbs left behind wait in the ground for the next spring to come.

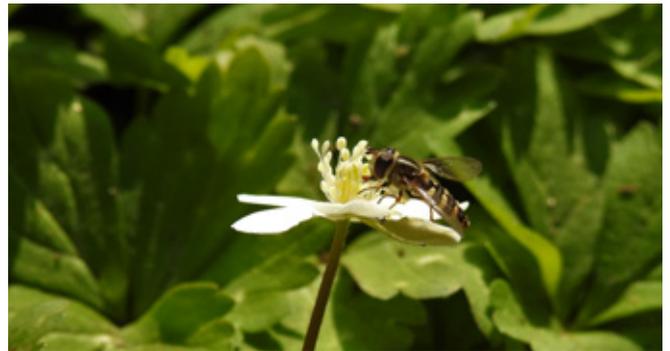
Each dogtooth violet blooms with one purple pink flower repeatedly opening and closing for about a week. The flower is closed at night and during cold days but becomes wide open during warmer days. While it grows widely from Hokkaido to Kyushu, there are beautiful colonies in heavy snow areas such as Hokkaido, the Tohoku region and Niigata Prefecture. Scenes of *satoyama* with Japanese dogtooth violets in full bloom after the snow melts are very beautiful.

I often liken the relationship between flowering plants and insects to the relationship between restaurants and customers. The “meal” provided by the flowers is pollen and nectar, and the “price” insects pay is the transport of pollen. Some restaurants are exclusive, while others are casual restaurants for everyone. The same is true for plants. The dogtooth violet can be said to be a plant that is regarded as a “high-end restaurant-type” that serves specific customers, such as bumblebees and *gifucho* (Japanese luehdorfia, a kind of butterfly). This can be seen from the purple pink color of the dogtooth violet flower, since insects generally tend to like white and yellow colors, and moreover because the flower faces downwards, making it difficult for weak-legged insects to perch on the flowers. Bumblebees and *gifucho* not only have the physical ability

to perch, but also memorize the color, shape and location of flowers very well, allowing them to choose the same kind of flower as they fly around from one to another. In other words, it’s a highly efficient way for these flowers to transport pollen.

On the other hand, “casual restaurant-type” plants attract a wide variety of insects, which then fly around to many flowers carrying the plants’ pollen. Such plants have bright colors, such as white or yellow, in line with the instinct of insects to generally fly toward what is bright. Moreover, the structure of the flowers is simple so that even insects unable to fly well or insects with short tongues can easily perch on the flowers and suck their nectar.

An example of a spring ephemeral that is a casual restaurant-type plant is *nirinso* (soft windflower) with its white flowers. The soft windflower blooms facing upward, so it is easy for insects to perch. This allows a variety of insects such as flies, *hirataabu* (a variety of hoverfly), and small bees and beetles to gather.



A *hirataabu* (a variety of hoverfly) eating the pollen of *nirinso* (soft windflower)

In addition to the dogtooth violet and soft windflower, are there any other plants that you would like to highlight as Japanese spring flowers.

There are many, but *egonoki* (Japanese snowbell) is one of them. Japanese snowbells are trees that are 7-8 meters high and bloom white fragrant flowers for about a week from May to June. Because it is a tree that can be seen anywhere in Japan, most people don’t hold it in high regard. However, in Europe and North America, it is popular as a tree planted in parks and private gardens, and it is exported from Japan. The name Japanese snowbell reflects the bell shape of the flower as it blooms facing downward.

In Japan, bumblebees gather when Japanese snowbells’ flowers bloom in spring. When the flowers fall and the early summer comes, insects such as *otoshibumi* (leaf rolling weevil), weevils, and aphids start to eat, live in or lay eggs in the leaves and fruits. The green-white fruit before ripening contains a fizzy substance called saponin. Therefore, in



Flowers of *egonoki* called Japanese snowbell

the old days, people crushed the fruit to extract a juice that they used as laundry detergent.

The fruit ripens in fall, after which it dries and peels off, and the hard seeds are exposed and hang on the branches. Then, a bird named *yamagara* (varied tit) that likes the fatty contents of the seed comes to take the seed. The varied tit cuts the shell of the hard seed with its beak and eats the contents. At the same time, it also collects, brings and buries to stores many seeds in-between stone walls and gaps between plants and plants in the ground, and elsewhere as winter food. What I want to point out is that it is beneficial for the Japanese snowbell to sprout and grow from the location and depth at which the varied tit buried its seeds. Some of the seeds survive until spring without being eaten and sprout. In other words, the Japanese snowbell uses the habits of the varied tit to spread its seeds to various places. The varied tit also gets benefits from the Japanese snowbell to survive the bitter winter. I really like the Japanese snowbell as it lives in symbiosis with so many other organisms.

Please tell us about some places where you can see wild plants that bloom in spring and that you would like to introduce to people from overseas.

There are many colonies of wild plants that bloom in spring throughout Japan. In the suburbs of Tokyo, for example, you can see *yukiyanagi* (Thunberg's meadowsweet) with white flowers on the rocky riverbanks of Nagatoro, which is a gorge on the upper part of the Arakawa River and famous as a tourist destination in Saitama Prefecture. Thunberg's meadowsweet is a common plant that grows in gardens and parks, but it was originally a wild plant that mainly grows in sunny rocky areas along rivers flowing through mountainous areas. Thunberg's meadowsweet grows on steep riverbanks that are submerged when the river rises. To prevent the plants from being swept away by the water, the leaves are elongated and streamlined to reduce water resistance, and the branches move sinuously, while the



Yukiyanagi (Thunberg's meadowsweet) blooming in white on the banks of the Arakawa River in Saitama Prefecture

roots are firmly stuck in the cracks of the rock. Rivers in Japan have many rapids, so they adapted to that environment and evolved to their current form. In the rocky areas in Nagatoro, wild wisteria also bloom around the Golden Week holiday in late April to early May.

Many plants such as the dogtooth violet and soft wind-flower grow naturally on Mt. Tsukuba in Ibaraki Prefecture, which is popular for hikers. Moreover, Mt. Takao in Tokyo, which is popular among tourists, is also decorated with various flowers. For example, on the slopes along the swamps, you can find the 1.5-meter-high *gakuutsugi*, an endemic Japanese species in the hydrangea family, that grows naturally there and displays very nicely scented neat white flowers.

Thanks to people who have conserved the rich natural environment in Japan, there still remains a rich and diverse natural environment and we can enjoy seasonal flowers. After COVID-19 subsides, I hope people will come from overseas to see Japan's natural scenery colored with various flowers. 📷

Interview by SAWAJI OSAMU



Gakuutsugi, a flower in the hydrangea family, on Mt. Takao in Tokyo



An *ezorisu* (Hokkaido squirrel) among the *katakuri* (Japanese dogtooth violets) and *ezoengosaku* (corydalis) at Urausu Shrine
Photo: Chappy/PIXTA

A Fairy Tale Flower Garden

Japanese dogtooth violets and corydalis bloom in late April in Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost region, where they signal the arrival of spring. These flowers grow abundantly in Hokkaido's Urausu Town, attracting wild birds and animals, who appear among the flowers and create a fairy tale world.

SUGIYAMA MAMORU

THE lovely light purple blossoms of *katakuri* (Japanese dogtooth violets), a plant in the lily family, bloom profusely within the grounds of Urausu Shrine in Urausu Town each year from late April through May. The pretty blue flowers of *ezoengosaku* (*Corydalis ambigua*), a small corydalis in the poppy family, bloom alongside the dogtooth violets, creating a garden with fairy tale-like colors across the expansive shrine grounds.

Urausu Town (population approximately 1,700 as of February 2022) is located in central



Japanese dogtooth violets
Photo: hiro cafe/PIXTA

western Hokkaido and is known for having a winery with the largest wine grape acreage in Japan. An official at the Urausu Town local government says of the spring flowers, “Urausu Town is an area with a lot of snow, even for Hokkaido. The flowers that we see as the snow begins to melt herald the return of spring, and everyone in the area looks forward to it.”

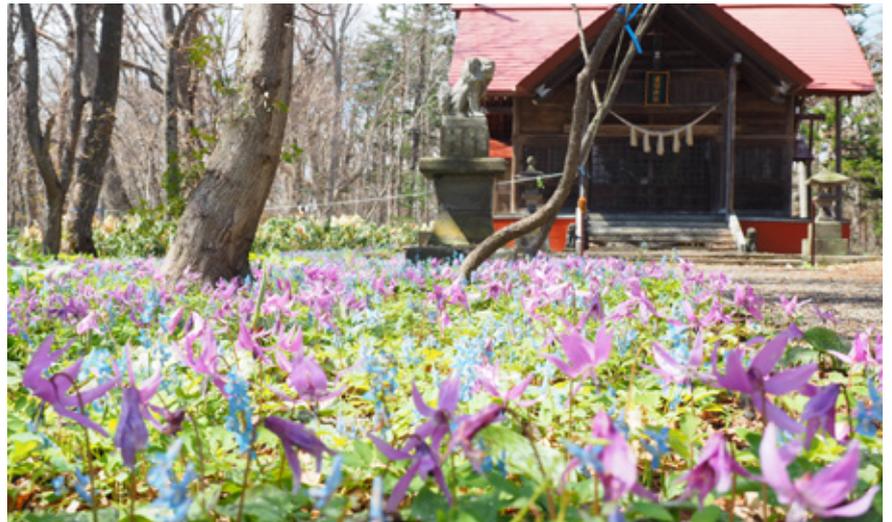
Japanese dogtooth violets can be seen widely from northeastern Asia to most parts of Japan, but the *ezoengosaku corydalis* grow predominantly in Hokkaido. Both are perennial plants, where buds appear on the ground’s surface and flowers bloom, but after the leaves have withered, the plant waits for the next spring underground as a stem. Plants that only make an appearance above ground for an extremely short period of time in the spring are known as “spring ephemerals,” or “spring fairies” in Japanese.

Springtime at Urausu Shrine, surrounded by light purple and blue flowers and fresh green from the various sprouting grasses, becomes a lively sight, a complete contrast to the snowy white scenery of winter. *Akagera* (great spotted woodpeckers), *yamagara* (varied tits), *shujukara* (Japanese tits), and a variety of other wild birds sing as if invited by the flowers, while squirrels, foxes, and other wild animals also make an appearance, enjoying the short-lived spring. Photography enthusiasts from around Japan visit Urausu Shrine to capture this unique fairy tale spring.

The Urausu Town official comments, “If you are lucky, you can even see an *ezorisu* (Hokkaido squirrel).”

The Hokkaido squirrel can often be encountered early in the morning. They may return to the forest after only a few minutes, but there are some times when they spend around an hour looking for food among the flowers. It is quite adorable to see a 25 cm tall Hokkaido squirrel walking among the 15 cm tall Japanese Dogtooth violets.

The *ezoengosaku corydalis* reach full bloom a little sooner than the dogtooth violets, meaning there is only about one week when it’s possible to see both plants in full bloom together. It is a rare chance indeed to encounter two “spring fairies” at the same time. 



Japanese dogtooth violets and *ezoengosaku corydalis* flowering on the grounds of Urausu Shrine in Urausu Town, Hokkaido.
Photo: hiro cafe/PIXTA



Ezoengosaku corydalis grow predominantly in Hokkaido
Photo: hiro cafe/PIXTA



An *akagera* (great spotted woodpecker) amidst the *ezoengosaku corydalis*
Photo: momohana/PIXTA

A Colony of Amur Adonis, Flower of Happiness and Longevity

Located in Kitakata City in Fukushima Prefecture, known in Japan for its ramen noodles and traditional storehouses, the Numanotaira district is home to one of the country's largest displays of Amur adonis.

YANAGISAWA MIHO

FROM mid-March to mid-April, the desolate winter fields of northeast Japan are transformed into a carpet of gold. The Numanotaira district of Yamato Town in Kitakata City is the habitat for more than a million *fukujuso* (Amur adonis, a perennial plant in the buttercup family) that bloom over an area of some five hectares, the largest display of these flowers in Japan. The brilliant yellow flowers of the Amur adonis herald the arrival of spring in this mountainous area and fill people with joy.



A cluster of Amur adonis

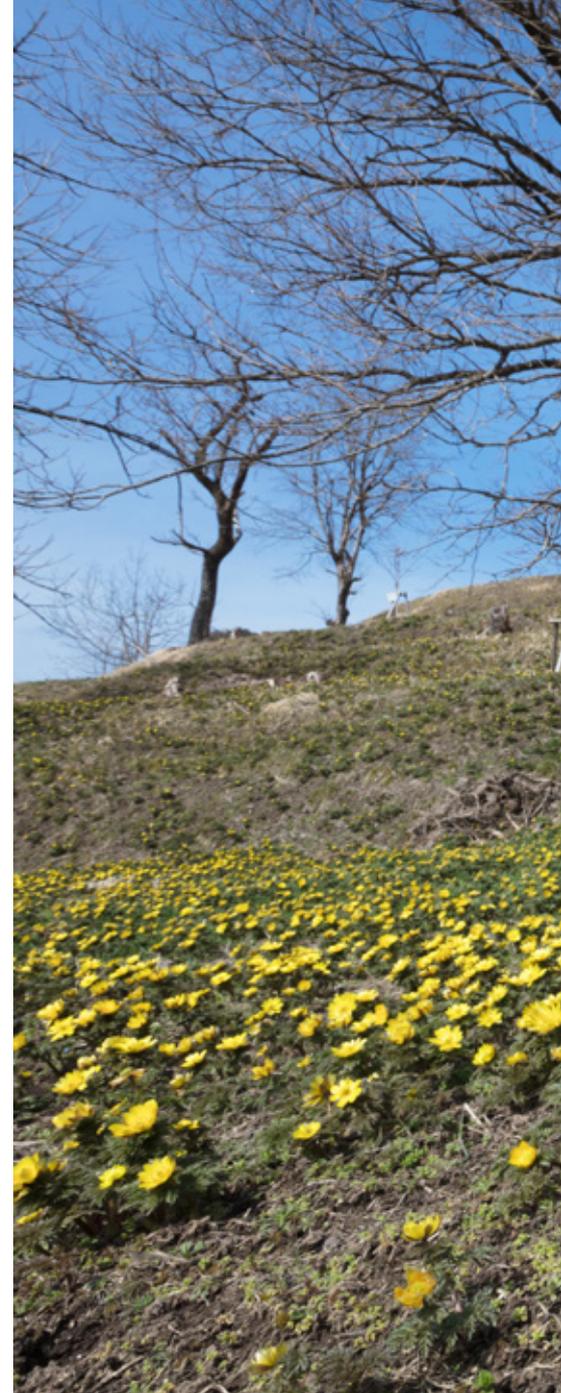
The area offers two walking trails, Yukige no Komichi and Hidamari no Komichi¹, which before the coronavirus outbreak attracted many visitors who came to admire the flowers, compose haiku, or enjoy spring in their own way.

As visitors ascend the Yukige trail, the Amur adonis blooming on the slopes facing the sun are clear to see. A short distance further along the trail, the vista opens up.

"It's a spectacular display of blooms that makes everyone who sees them exclaim in delight as soon as the flowers come into view. The petals of the Amur adonis have a glossy sheen that glitters and sparkles in the sunlight, giving the impression of a carpet of gold," says an official of the Yamato General Branch Office of Kitakata City, which oversees the management of the area, with a sunny smile.

Amur adonis are in full bloom along the Hidamari no Komichi, a path leading from the village past Yukige no Komichi to Choshoji Temple. The temple grounds also offer a beautiful view of the flower-covered slopes.

In the winter months, the area gets heavy snowfalls. Come spring, Amur adonis can be seen not only on the slopes bathed in sunshine but also peeking out from the unmelted snow in the shade. The blooming of Amur adonis coincides with that of other wildflowers. *Azumachige* (*Anemone raddeana*) with its white



Fukujuso (Amur adonis) in flower in the Numanotaira district of Yamato Town, Kitakata City, Fukushima Prefecture
Photo: AFL0

flowers, *otome-engosaku* (*Corydalis fukuharae*) with its blue flowers, and *katakuri* (Japanese dogtooth violet) with its purple flowers, together with the yellow flowers of Amur adonis, lend color to the mountain villages.

"While Kitakata City is famous for its ramen noodles, Yamato Town's specialty is actually *soba* (buckwheat) noodles," says the official. In March and April, *kanzarashi* soba is a unique offering in the town. These are noodles prepared from buckwheat that has been exposed to cold winter water and wind, and which



are characterized by their elastic texture and sweetness.

“Kanzarashi soba is said to have been presented to the Tokugawa shoguns in days of old,” the official says.

“The colony of Amur adonis is around ten kilometers from the center of town. Although it’s a little out of the way, I hope that after the COVID-19 situation is over, people will come and enjoy the soba noodles and the glorious profusion of these auspicious flowers, written in Japanese with the characters for ‘happiness’ and ‘longevity’ⁱⁱ.”

The official is also looking forward to the season when the flower comes into bloom. ㊦

i Yukige means “melting snow” and hidamari means “sunny spot.”

ii The Japanese name of the flower is *fukujuso*, written with the characters “fuku” meaning happiness and “ju” meaning longevity.



Yamato Town’s specialty *kansazarashi* soba with tempura
Photo: TRUTTA/PIXTA

The peach orchards of Fuefuki City in blossom with the still snowy Mt. Yatsugatake beyond
Photo: Courtesy of Fuefuki City



Peach-Colored Spring in Fuefuki City

Fuefuki City in Yamanashi Prefecture is one of Japan's leading peach-producing regions, and when spring comes, the entire city is adorned with beautiful peachy pink blossoms.

FUJITA MAO

FUEFUKI City in Yamanashi Prefecture lies in a basin at the foot of Mt. Fuji on a fertile alluvial fan with good drainage. Moreover, the climate features a large temperature difference between day and night, so the land is well-suited to peach cultivation. There are many peach orchards throughout the city.

The peach belongs to the rose family and before bearing fruit displays pretty spring flowers of white, pink and red. All the flowers in the peach orchards in Fuefuki City blossom in unison in early April every year. They are a symbol of spring in

Peach blossoms and rapeseed flowers
Photo: Courtesy of Fuefuki City





the city.

According to Ichikawa Takayuki of the Fuefuki Tourism Products Federation, “Peaches are cultivated across about 1,200 hectares in Fuefuki City, and it’s said there are some 250,000 peach trees in the city. If you look out over the city from upland areas during peach blooming season, your field of view will be filled with a fantastic landscape colored by peach flowers. It looks like a pink carpet, with the alluvial fan becoming a literal Peach

Blossom Land.” Adding to the charm, on clear days Mt. Fuji can be seen in the distance beyond the peach flowers.

Spring in Fuefuki City is not just about peach blossoms. Cherry blossoms, *mizubasho* (Asian skunk cabbage), *nihon suzuran* (lily of the valley), and many other flowers also bloom at the same time.

Some 300 cherry trees grow in the city’s Yatsushiro Furusato Park. In recent years, climate change has caused peach

blossoms to bloom earlier and it is now possible to enjoy watching them at the same time as the cherry blossoms. A large keyhole-shaped tomb (Oka Choshizuka tomb) has been restored in the park at the top of the hill. It was originally built in the late fourth century. Next to it grow two 60-year-old Somei-yoshino cherry trees with large branches bearing beautiful flowers. The gradations of peach and cherry blossoms that extend below make up a beautiful and magnificent scenery. Every year from late March to mid-April, the Peach Blossom Spring Festival is held in Fuefuki City, and people gather to walk around the peach orchards while enjoying the blossoms and delicate fragrance of peach or attending the related events planned. Ichikawa says, “People coming to the Peach Blossom Spring Festival from outside Fuefuki have often told me that it moved them or had a healing effect on them. All we are doing is showcasing the unique nature of this place, but we are very happy that it can bring joy to people.”

Not long after the flowering season has ended in Peach Blossom Land comes the summer season of the fruit—sweet and delicious peaches with a fragrance that reminds us of the beautiful blossoms. 🍑



Peach trees in blossom with Mt. Fuji on the horizon
Photo: Non-non



The keyhole-shaped tomb and cherry trees in blossom at Yatsushiro Furusato Park
Photo: Courtesy of Fuefuki City

Asahi Funakawa "Spring Quartet"

When spring comes to Asahi Town in Toyama Prefecture, crowds are drawn to the cherry trees, tulips and rapeseed flowers that burst into bloom together at the foot of a mountain still covered with snow—a colorful scene known as the "Spring Quartet."

SATO KUMIKO

IN Asahi Town on the eastern edge of Toyama Prefecture there is a colorful spring scene in which the rows of cherry trees along a 1.2-km stretch of the Funakawa River bloom at the same time as the tulips and rapeseed flowers in nearby fields. This panorama of delicate pink cherry blossoms, red, white and yellow tulips, and brilliant yellow rapeseed

flowers, with a snow-capped Mt. Asahidake (elevation of 2,418 meters) as the backdrop, is known as the "Spring Quartet" and attracts many people.

In fact, tulip bulbs have been cultivated in Toyama Prefecture for a little more than a century. At one point, close to 60% of all the tulip bulbs sold in Japan were cultivated in Toyama Prefecture. In



Cherry trees lining the Funakawa River

recent years, however, domestic bulbs have been replaced by imported ones, and only one tulip bulb farm remains in Asahi Town, down from a high of thirty during the town's tulip producing heyday.

That farm is Tulist Yamazaki. Its owner, Yamazaki Hisao, listened to local senior citizens who missed growing tulip varieties that bloomed at the same time as the cherry blossoms, and acquired an extremely early blooming variety from the Netherlands and tried to cultivate

All photos: Courtesy of Asahi Town Tourism Association





Tulips



Rapeseed flowers



Planting tulip bulbs

them. These tulips bloomed at the same time as the cherry blossoms for the first time in 2009. Since then, Yamazaki has planted rapeseed, which bloom around the same time, and has worked to cultivate those flowers with the creation of scenery in mind—as if he is painting a picture of spring fields stretching out towards the mountain.

“The rows of cherry trees along the Funakawa River were planted in 1957 when river improvements were carried out,” says Kamisawa Seiko of the

Asahi Town Tourism Association. “Local people planted around 280 cherry trees, which are of the Somei-yoshino variety. Since then, local people have worked to ensure that the trees are kept well by pruning them and preventing disease and insect damage.”

Local people also help with tulip bulb cultivation. One of the most laborious parts of tulip bulb cultivation for farmers is the picking of blooming flowers¹ to allow nutrients to be stored within the bulb. Therefore, the Tourism Association

recruits a “Tulip Flower Picking Team” to help the farmers. Each year, many parents join the team along with their children, and the picking of flowers has become an activity meant to pass down the “Spring Quartet” to the next generation while enjoying it at the same time. **1**

¹ It may seem like picking the flowers is a waste, but it is a necessary task to promote bulb enlargement. The bulbs grow underground for about six weeks after the flowers are picked, and before the rainy season in June arrives, the bulbs are dug up, dried, and stored until it is time for the bulbs to be planted and take root again.

Cherry blossoms, rapeseed flowers and tulips bloom against the backdrop of the lingering snow on Mt. Asahi-dake



A Silky Wisteria Said To Be Over 1,200 Years Old



Sainokami no Fuji viewed from above
Photo: AFL0

Fukuchiyama City in Kyoto Prefecture is home to a silky wisteria called Sainokami no Fuji which is estimated to be over 1,200 years old. From late April to early May, its purple flowers cascading over a wooden trellis delight onlookers with their elegance and grace.

YANAGISAWA MIHO

MASSSES of purple flower clusters cascade over a large trellis, giving off a sweet fragrance. Visitors gather beneath this “ceiling” of flowers to delight in the swaying of the elegant purple clusters of flowers in the faintest of breezes, referred to by the Japanese since ancient times as *fuji-nami*, or wisteria waves. This scene can be observed every spring under a *yamafuji* (a variety of silky wisteria) called Sainokami no Fuji that grows in Fukuchiyama City, Kyoto Prefecture.

The Sainokami no Fuji is estimated to be 1,200 years old and is designated a natural monument by Kyoto Prefecture.

Six trunks of varying sizes, including one standing approximately 3 meters tall and measuring 180 centimeters around its circumference, are entwined and spread their branches over a trellis measuring 30 meters square.

The silky wisteria is a species of *fuji* (wisteria) endemic to Japan, a flowering vine of the pea family native to mountainous areas in almost half of the west of the country. The tendrils of the silky wisteria grow anticlockwise and its flower clusters are generally 10 to 20 centimeters long. The flower clusters of the Sainokami no Fuji are longer, measuring 30 to 40 centimeters, and most years look at their best from late April to early May.

An official at the Fukuchiyama City Hall Oe Branch, which manages the Sainokami no Fuji, says, “The trellis has been made low so visitors can reach out and touch the flower clusters. The spectacular sight of the flowers cascading over the large trellis has a healing effect.”

Makura no soshi (*The Pillow Book*)¹, a collection of observations written in the middle of the Heian period (late 8th



The entwined trunks and branches of Sainokami no Fuji
Photo: AFL0



Purple flower clusters cascade over the trellis
Photo: Courtesy of Fukuchiyama City



A small shrine (*hokora*) has been established under the ancient tree
Photo: Courtesy of Fukuchiyama City

century to late 12th century) when court culture flourished in Kyoto, mentions wisteria as an example of something “noble” that was admired by the aristocracy. In *Makura no soshi*, wisteria are described thus: “The clusters of deep purple blooms cascading gracefully down are truly splendid.” The Sainokami no Fuji flower clusters, then, evoke an ideal espoused by the aristocracy of the time.

“I heard that an elementary school student once wrote in her composition, ‘The Sainokami no Fuji is the flower of our heart.’ With its long history of over 1,200 years, the Sainokami no Fuji has played a role in passing down the Japanese people’s affection for flowers to the next generation,” says the local government official.

Still going strong at 1,200 years old, the Sainokami no Fuji is a noble tree that continues to nurture Japanese people’s love for flowers. **▼**

ⁱ A collection of observations by Sei Shonagon, author and a lady at the Imperial Court of Japan (born in the second half of the 10th century and died in the middle of the first half of the 11th century).

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.

SASAKI TAKASHI

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

A Carpet of Azaleas Overlooking the Sea

Nagushiyama Park in northwestern Kyushu, the most southerly of Japan's four main islands, is spectacular in springtime for its carpet of azalea flowers overlooking the sea.

SUGIYAMA MAMORU

TSUTSUJI (azaleas), with their red, pink or white blooms from April to June, have long been selectively cultivated in Japan for horticultural use, including as garden plants. Azaleas are in fact one of the most familiar plants in Japan, being commonly planted along streets and in parks. There are many celebrated viewing spots for azaleas throughout Japan, but among these Nagushiyama Park in Sasebo City, Nagasaki Prefecture, is renowned for its magnificent view of the sea behind a carpet of blooming flowers.

Nagushiyama Park is located in the area around the summit of the 234-meter-high Mt. Nagushiyama in

Sasebo City, Nagasaki Prefecture. Local people have been planting azaleas here since 1969. On the southern slope of the park overlooking the sea, around 100,000 *kurumetsutsuji* and *hiradotsutsuji* azalea, endemic species of Japan, bloom in reds and pinks from mid-April to early May, creating a landscape that seems to be decorated with a carpet of flowers.

“The view of the azaleas looking up the mountain side from the observation deck halfway up the slope is awe-inspiring, while the view in the opposite direction is of a sea dotted with islands. The contrast between the two is extremely dynamic,” says a member of staff at the Nagushiyama Visitor Center.

The surrounding coastline, including Nagushiyama Park, is officially designated as the Saikai National Park, also known as

the “kingdom of islands.” Looking east from the park, one can see the rias coastline (an intricately complex or “sawtooth” coastline) and the many islands known collectively as Kujukushima below, with the strikingly large island of Hirado, which gives its name to the *hiradotsutsuji* azalea variety, on the opposite shore. Kujukushima comprises 208 islands, from small to large, and the panoramic view from Nagushiyama Park takes in 110 of those islands, situated mostly in the northern half of Kujukushima and known collectively as Kita-kujukushima¹.

“If you want to enjoy the view of azaleas together with the Kita-kujukushima islands in the sea, we recommend the observation deck at the summit. The spectacle of the sun setting over Hirado Island in particular is breathtakingly



Evening view of Kita-kujukushima from the observatory at the summit
Photo: Courtesy of Nagushiyama Visitor Center

beautiful, and many people take photos of it,” says the Visitor Center staff member. Red azalea means “the joy of love” in the language of flowers, and it seems it’s a popular spot for lovers.

Sasebo City is the location of Mt. Ishidake (191 meters above sea level), where the opening scene of the Hollywood movie *The Last Samurai* was filmed. The port city is full of appeal, offering specialties such as Sasebo burgers and lemon steaks, as well as a wide range of local seafood and other dishes. In spring, that appeal is magnified by the vivid colors of the azalea blossoms. ㊦

i The Kujukushima islands that extend from Shikamachi Town, where Mt. Nagushiyama is located in Sasebo City, to Kosasa Town in Sasebo City, are called Kita-kujukushima.



Azaleas at Nagushiyama Park in Sasebo City, Nagasaki Prefecture
Photo: Courtesy of Nagushiyama Visitor Center



Night sky and azaleas on Mt. Nagushiyama
Photo: Courtesy of Nagushiyama Visitor Center



View over Sasebo City toward Kujukushima from the observatory located at the summit of Mt. Ishidake (shooting location for the opening scene of the Hollywood movie *The Last Samurai*)



Film Farming,

Making It Possible for Anyone to Farm Anywhere

A breakthrough farming method has been developed that makes it possible for anyone to produce high-quality crops even in environments where crop cultivation is difficult.

UMEZAWA AKIRA

The world today is facing climate change that causes extreme weather such as droughts and heavy rains, threatening stable production of crops.

In order to solve this problem, a farming method that can grow high-quality crops with a small amount of water and without using soil even in harsh environments has been developed. Named IMEC (intelligent membrane culture), it utilizes a technique called “film farming” that uses a special film instead of soil. It was developed by Mori Yuichi, the founder and current chairman of Mebiol Inc., a startup headquartered in Hiratsuka City, Kanagawa Prefecture.

Mori says, “I had been conducting research on medical devices using advanced polymer technology, such

as artificial blood vessels and dialysis membranes, and thought that applying that technology to plant cultivation could contribute to solving the global food shortage problem, so I founded Mebiol in 1995.”

This film farming method IMEC uses “hydromembrane,” which is a special film with small holes on a nanometer scale (a nanometer is one billionth of a meter), instead of soil. The film is supplied with no more than moisture and nutrients through drip tubes, with the plants growing as they extend their roots on the surface of this film. If the nutrient solution is contaminated with viruses and bacteria, it cannot pass through the nanometer-sized holes, so the plants rarely get sick and it is possible to greatly reduce the amount of

Tomato cultivation using IMEC (Mebiol’s film farming method)

pesticide used.

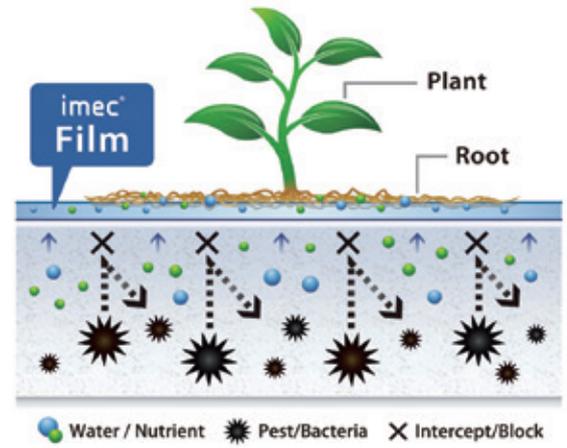
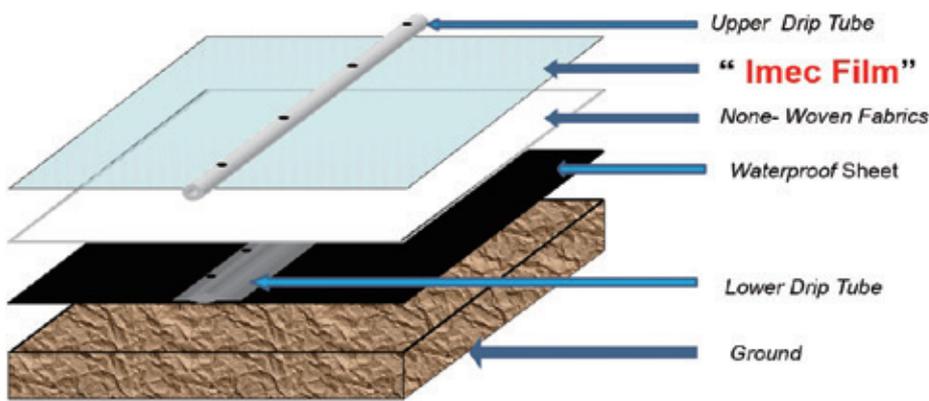
Moreover, the waterproof sheet laid under the film does not leak the nutrient solution to the ground, and the water necessary for growth is only a fraction of the conventional amount, so crops can be grown even in places with little water. In addition, the plants are safe from soil pollution caused by excessive salinity and pests.

Moreover, this farming method helps improve the quality of crops. For example, it is easier to grow tomatoes with high sugar content and nutritional value than with conventional farming methods. Plants that grow tomatoes and other fruit have a property where they increase the sugar content and nutritional value of the fruit when there is water shortage, something that is known as “water stress.” IMEC makes it possible to adjust moisture to bring out this property.

Mori explains, “The surface of the hydromembrane looks dry at first glance, but in reality there is a small amount of moisture and nutrients inside the film. Plants try to take in the trace amounts of moisture and nutrients over a larger



Mori Yuichi (chairman of Mebiol Inc.) shows how the plants extend their roots on the film surface



The structure of the IMEC film

IMEC makes it possible to cultivate crops without having to worry about pests, pathogens and soil pollution



Fruit and vegetable cultivation using IMEC

area by rooting on the surface of the film and extending fine root hairs. As this happens, the plants undergo ‘water stress,’ which results in high sugar content and nutritional value.”

There already existed farming methods that use “water stress,” but the amount of water and timing have been difficult to adjust. However, with this farming method, you do not need time-consuming moisture management, and even those who have no experience in agriculture can learn the cultivation techniques in a short period of time, allowing them to produce high-quality crops.

Mebioli’s film farming method has been recognized for contributing to the SDGs advocated by the United Nations. It has been awarded many awards. For example, in 2017, it was awarded the Director General of Small and Medium Enterprise Agency Award at the Japan Venture Awards hosted by the Organization for Small & Medium Enterprises and Regional Innovation, Japan, and in 2019, the international award Innovative Ideas and Technologies in Agribusiness by the Italian Investment and Technology Promotion Office of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO ITPO Italy).

IMEC has been patented in more than 120 countries, and the company is working to introduce it around the world. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), tomatoes have been produced in a 5,000-square-meter greenhouse that uses IMEC since 2014, with produce being shipped to local high-end restaurants. Since 2015, tomato cultivation using IMEC has also been done near Shanghai in China. Moreover, in 2020, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) decided to conduct a survey for the introduction of IMEC in the Republic of Kenya

as one of their SDGs Business Supporting Surveys. The company aims to facilitate stable production of high-quality, highly nutritious crops in Kenya, which suffers from unstable rainfall and other adverse weather phenomena.

Mori comments, “The IMEC technology enables agriculture in areas where it has previously been difficult due to climate and soil conditions, so now we can expand farmland more and more.”

The company is working to support economic revitalization and help people break free from poverty by establishing agriculture in drought-stricken areas in Africa and around the world, as well as conducting research to make pharmaceuticals from genetically modified plants grown with IMEC. Mori is working hard toward the goal of expanding arable land around the world through IMEC and maximizing its economic impact. ⁷



Mebioli president Yoshioka Hiroshi (right) receiving the award Innovative Ideas and Technologies in Agribusiness (organized by UNIDO ITPO Italy) in Italy in May 2019



A Floral Artist Fusing Japanese and Western Styles

Nicolai Bergmann from Denmark is a floral artist based in Japan who creates floral arrangements in a fusion style of “East meets West.”

SATO KUMIKO



Bergmann’s work incorporating a Japanese flower vessel



Bergmann’s work fuses European style floral arrangements with Japanese flower vases

DANISH-BORN Nicolai Bergmann is a floral artist who creates works that express a fusion of “East meets West,” boldly blending European-style floral design with traditional Japanese flower vases and other vessels made of materials such as lacquerware or ceramics, and producing exhibits that combine staggeringly innovative ideas with the attention to detail found in Japanese craftsmanship. Bergmann’s artworks have been highly acclaimed both in Japan and overseas. Nicolai Bergmann Flowers & Design operates in ten locations in Japan, including the flagship store in Tokyo’s popular fashion district of Minami Aoyama, and the brand has expanded its reach to Denmark, Los Angeles and Seoul. Today, Bergmann is one of the most popular floral artists in the world.

Bergmann was born in Dragør, a town near Copenhagen surrounded by greenery. His father was a wholesale dealer of potted plants while his grandfather ran an apple farm. Raised in this environment, he went on to enroll at the National Business College of Denmark, becoming a certified florist at the age of 19. After graduating, he took a



trip to Japan.

“I only chose Japan because my father happened to have contacts there, but I enjoyed that experience and fell in love with Japanese culture,” says Bergmann. He returned to Japan at the age of 21 and spent the next seven years working at a local flower shop in Tokyo to gain experience.

Bergmann made a name for himself with the release of his Flower Box in 2000. It was a totally innovative concept: a box made of paper tightly packed with fresh flowers.

“I was asked by a PR representative of a certain brand to deliver 600 bouquets of flowers to be presented as gifts to guests at a press event. Given the large number of flowers, they had to be arranged in a form that allowed them to be stacked and stored. That’s how I came up with the idea of the flower box. New ideas always come about as a result of challenging situations,” says Bergmann.

In 2001, he established Nicolai Bergmann Flowers & Design, taking the business global. Japan remained his creative base, however, and Bergmann continued with the “fusion” approach of blending European-style floral design with Japanese traditions. A notable example of this enduring style was the 2014 exhibition at Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine in Fukuoka Prefecture, which he recalls as “the most memorable event.” Says Bergmann, “The scale of the event grew with each subsequent exhibition in 2016 and 2018, to the point where flower installations were exhibited simultaneously at four neighboring shrines. A local community of more than a hun-

dred volunteers was formed to assist with the event. I believe my exhibitions have set Dazaifu Tenmangu on a new path in its history.”

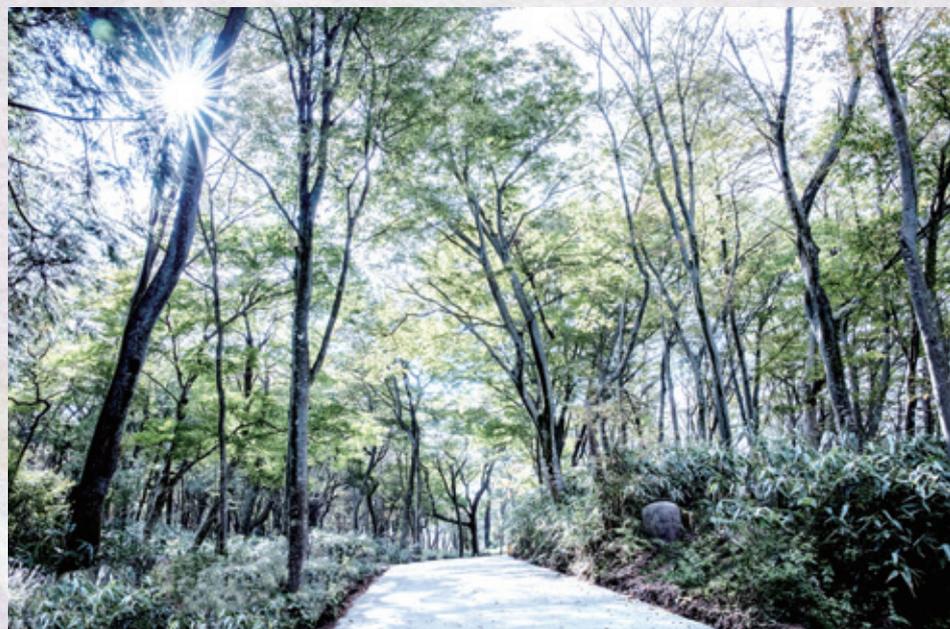
In April 2022, after eight years in the planning and preparation, Nicolai Bergmann Hakone Gardens will open in Hakone, Kanagawa Prefecture. Visitors arriving at the vast site will be greeted by the sight of a walking path that meanders and makes the most of the original terrain. Along the path will be flowers selected and planted according to a plan devised by Bergmann that shows them at their seasonal best based on the artist’s deep appreciation of the Japanese climate. Also displayed at various locations around the area will be floral art and objets created by Bergmann.

Speaking of his aspirations for the future, Bergmann says, “I have always

- 1 Bergmann’s signature Flower Box packed tightly with colorful flowers
- 2 Bergmann’s work exhibited at Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine in Fukuoka Prefecture in 2018
- 3 A work by Bergmann using orchids, exhibited at Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine in 2018

sought to make an impression as a flower artist on the customers who come into my flower shops each day. Nicolai Bergmann Hakone Gardens extends that desire to the great outdoors. I hope to plan a variety of other events.”

Bergmann’s Flower Box was a delightful surprise. Anticipation is mounting to see what kind of floral art he will show us next in Hakone, in his stores, and at future events. 



Nicolai Bergmann Hakone Gardens opens in Hakone in April 2022

Shakuhachi's Timeless Timbre Brings Rich Experience to Global Audiences

Shakuhachi player Kuroda Reison visited six countries over the course of two months in 2019 as a Japan Cultural Envoy, sharing this Japanese instrument.

YANAGISAWA MIHO



Shakuhachi player Kuroda Reison

Photo: ©Hidaki Tomoko

THE *shakuhachi* is a traditional Japanese woodwind instrument held vertically like a recorder. The tone is produced by blowing across a hole at the top of the instrument known as the *utaguchi* and pressing or lifting fingers on the five holes of the body: four on the front and one on the back. The shakuhachi is typically made from the root end of bamboo cut to about 54 centimeters long.

The instrument has been widely used for background music in samurai dramas and movies, and as an accompaniment to Japanese folk songs. Because of that, it has often been seen as a folksy,



A local paper in Londrina, Brazil, reporting on a joint performance by Kuroda Reison and local taiko drum group Ishindaiko

Photo: Courtesy of Kuroda Reison

old-fashioned instrument. Shakuhachi player Kuroda Reison aspired to “break this stereotypical idea of the instrument and demonstrate to people all over the world that while the shakuhachi can perform classical performances of ancient music, it is also an instrument that resonates with people of the twenty-first century.”

According to Kuroda, people from outside Japan have come to love the shakuhachi over the last fifty years or so. The World Shakuhachi Festival, which began in Okayama Prefecture, Japan, in 1994, continues to be held approximately once every four years in different parts of the world, including Boulder and New York in the United States, Sydney, Australia, and London, the United Kingdom.

It is said that Japanese contemporary composer Takemitsu Toru’s *November Steps* is one of the major reasons for the shakuhachi coming to be known worldwide. The piece premiered in 1967 under the direction of conductor Ozawa Seiji, with *biwa*ⁱ, shakuhachi, and the New York Philharmonic, in New York. Shakuhachi was played by the renowned player Yokoyama Katsuya.

Kuroda states that he would not have chosen to become a shakuhachi player if he had not encountered this composition. “Someday, I hope to compose and perform a masterpiece for the shakuhachi that fascinates people around the world, just like *November Steps*.”

Kuroda was appointed as a Japan Cultural Envoy in 2019, and over the course of two months, he visited China, Italy, Brazil, France, Germany and Portugal, and performed around 34 times, including at lectures and workshops.

He performed in a joint performance with the world-famous chamber music group mdi ensemble in Milan, Italy, performing the flute part for Mozart’s *Flute Quartet* on the shakuhachi. He commissioned a work to be performed in Italy by the young Japanese composer Kimura Erika for the same ensemble. He also asked Urabe Yuki, another young Japanese composer, who was studying at the Conservatorio di Milano, to compose a piece for the ensemble. By asking young composers, Kuroda hoped to convey to them how the shakuhachi, which has been categorized as an ancient instrument, can also be successful as a modern instrument.



Kuroda Reison (center) with local taiko drum group Ishindaiko in Londrina, Brazil

Photo: Courtesy of Kuroda Reison



Kuroda Reison (left) performs with the chamber music group mdi ensemble at a recital in Milan, Italy

Photo: Courtesy of Kuroda Reison



Solo performance at the Curitiba Immigrant Festival in Brazil

Photo: Courtesy of Kuroda Reison

Kuroda comments that “the audience in Milan listened intently so as to not miss a single sound of the compositions by these young women. There was a strong sense of unity between the performers and the audience.”

In Berlin, Germany, Kuroda played to a full house. As the performance ended, there were shouts of “Bravo!” and loud whistles from the audience. Kuroda claims that he was moved by the audience’s desire to genuinely enjoy an unknown genre of music and the shakuhachi’s timbre. He was thrilled, sensing that the shakuhachi was accepted by people outside of Japan as a timeless instrument that could touch the hearts of people today.

He also performed together with local *choro* and *baiao* (forms of Brazilian instrumental popular music) musicians in Sao Paulo, Brazil, playing bossa nova on his shakuhachi, communicating with the local performers through their instruments. In Curitiba, Brazil, he played a solo in an arena-sized venue. In Londrina, Brazil, he performed the Yosakoi Naruko Odori (festival dance music from Kochi Prefecture) with local taiko drum group Ishindaiko as well as Japanese children’s songs on his own. He received tremendous ovations there as well.

Kuroda’s experience as a Japan Cultural Envoy has greatly influenced his musical career. “I felt a stronger desire to write new compositions and take on joint performances with a variety of people to further expand the potential of the shakuhachi as an instrument that resonates with the hearts of people from around the world.” **J**

ⁱ A traditional Japanese instrument with ancient roots in China and southern Asia. Has a similar shape to the lute, an ancient European instrument. See *Highlighting Japan*, August 2021: https://www.gov-online.go.jp/eng/publicity/book/hlj/html/202108/202108_11_en.html

Sakurajima
is an active
volcano



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Sakurajima
Komikan are
very small *mikan*
(mandarin
oranges) grown
on Sakurajima



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Sakurajima
Komikan are
juicy, sweet
and aromatic

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GI JAPAN PRODUCTS



Sakurajima Komikan

桜島小みかん

Sakurajima Komikan

Sakurajima is a peninsula in Kinko Bay (also known as Kagoshima Bay) in Kagoshima Prefecture. It was once an island, but lava flowing from a volcanic eruption in 1914 connected Sakurajima to the Osumi peninsula. The volcano is still active and has become a symbol of Kagoshima Prefecture. Sakurajima Komikan are very small (*ko*) *mikan*, a type of mandarin orange, grown in Sakurajima. Although the fruit are small, measuring just 4–5 cm, they are big on flavor, being extraordinarily sweet and aromatic. The peel too has a distinctive citrus fragrance and is used to flavor noodles, pickles, tea and alcoholic beverages. Komikan have long been cultivated on Sakurajima, which is surrounded by ocean, has a temperate climate and is blessed by plenty of sunlight all year round.

Text and images courtesy of Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries: <https://gi-act.maff.go.jp/en/register/entry/46.html>



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