

## Creating Places Renowned for Cherry Blossoms and Beautiful Local Environments

Flower viewing has been a greatly anticipated delight for the Japanese since ancient times, with a history stretching back as far as the Heian era a thousand years ago. While people consider it only natural for cherry trees, the trees central to flower viewing, to bloom every spring, these trees are in fact quite delicate. Cherry blossoms burst forth in spring as if mustering all at once the power they stored up over the previous year, then fall to the ground a short time later. With such quiet but extreme fluctuations, these trees require ongoing care, much like professional athletes.

As one of its contributions to society, Komatsu has been supporting the Flower Association of Japan, which nurtures cherry blossom viewing places and cultivates local environments rich in flowers, thereby fostering local areas of beauty and abundant greenery.



A yae-beni-shidare (*Prunus pendula* "Pleno-rosea") blooming in the Komatsu Head Office rooftop garden in Tokyo, Japan

### The Flower Association of Japan, Founded in 1962

The Flower Association of Japan was established in 1962 to, among various aims, nurture cherry blossom viewing sites under its goal of using flowers to uplift people in some way. Over the past 47 years, the Association has grown more than 2.2 million cherry saplings, donating them to parks, streets, schools, and many other recipients all over the globe to help create beautiful local environments.

The Association also utilizes its accumulated expertise in these trees to preserve and revitalize them in cooperation with local residents who love cherry trees.

### Preserving the Environment in Cooperation with Local Residents

Cherry trees in the city of Kunitachi in Tokyo, Japan that the local residents regard with great pride had become weaker owing largely to recent changes in the environment. The Flower Association of Japan was consulted on how to help the trees recover their vigor.

Cherry trees lose vitality when their roots are stepped on, because the roots are less able to absorb nutrients. To bring back the trees' vibrancy, the Association recommended the planting of Chinese violet cress (blooming from March to April) around the roots to prevent people from stepping on them. In the summer, after the Chinese violet cress has finished blooming, it is cut back and placed around the bases of the cherry trees as compost, and in the autumn, sulfur cosmos (blooming from June to September) is then planted. In this way, the Association's advice provides for year-round management of the cherry trees while also fostering the aesthetics of the surrounding environment. The local volunteer group Kunitachi Sakuramori continues to take care of the cherry trees.



Local volunteers from Kunitachi Sakuramori taking care of the cherry trees

### One of the Largest Cherry Tree Exhibition Gardens in the World

The 83,000 m<sup>2</sup> Yuki farm in the city of Yuki in Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan produces some 30,000 cherry saplings annually, making it one of the major locations in fostering the creation of cherry blossom viewing sites. The farm boasts one of the largest cherry tree collections in the world, with 350 types under cultivation in its onsite exhibition garden.

Over the course of cultivation at the farm, the saplings are observed to discover what type of environment is ideal for each variety of cherry tree and which varieties are best suited for particular cherry blossom viewing sites. When requests arrive from local areas hoping to create a viewing site, the Association selects and provides appropriate varieties of saplings after considering the environment and how the trees will be used. Most types of these cherry trees have been developed through crossing with wild cherry trees. The farm is operated on the premise that it is important to sustain cherry tree genes so that as many varieties can be enjoyed by the public as possible while also ensuring the preservation of the descendents of varieties that have been admired since antiquity.

The farm offers visitors hands-on opportunities for planting, managing, mixing varieties, and other practical aspects of creating cherry tree viewing sites. One community group that took home a sapling remarked, "We started out cultivating our tree wondering if that single sapling would really grow, but after one year it bloomed,

and after five years that cherry tree has become truly uplifting for us, with all of us sharing the happiness." A single sapling has engendered the sense of community shared by local residents.

Preserving the genes of cherry trees that have evolved for as much as a thousand years is also protecting assets with a deep link to Japanese culture. It can give comfort and foster bonds among local residents that have been weakening against the backdrop of urbanization. Mindful of this importance, Komatsu will continue to support the Flower Association of Japan.

## The Yuki Farm

A major location in fostering cherry blossom viewing sites



The exhibition garden nurtures 350 varieties of cherry trees planted by types. Visitors can enjoy cherry blossoms of different varieties from March through December.



Grafting is used to propagate and raise the cherry saplings. Grafted saplings in their first year of growth are shipped throughout Japan after reaching 1 meter in height.



Research is underway to produce cherry saplings from tissue cultures. The farm is accumulating techniques for large-scale production of saplings.