1. **Local Plants: *Sarutori-ibara* (China Root; *Smilax china*)**

This deciduous (seasonally shedding) creeping shrub grows in fields and mountains, and gets its name (*sarutori-ibara*, or “monkey-catching thorn”) from the fact that hapless monkeys would sometimes get caught up in the thorns and tendrils that emerge from its stalk. It is also notable for its pleasantly aromatic and edible leaves, which are eaten wrapped around soft *mochi* rice cakes in this region, just as the oak leaf is used elsewhere in Japan: in Naruto, the nickname of these rice cakes is *baramochi* (“rose mochi”).

The China root has both male and female varieties, and grows twisting and stretching to heights of between 50 centimeters and 3 meters. Its leaves range in shape from round to an elongated oval, with a short stem and a smooth edge all the way around. From April to May new leaves appear, accompanied by a multitude of light yellowish-green flowers. This plant also bears round fruits that ripen to a vivid red in October–November.