

In Nozawa Onsen you can't miss the traditional products made from the beautiful purple flowering plant Akebi vine (*Akebia quinata*), sometimes called chocolate vine or five-leaf akebia. Particularly famous are the woven little baskets used for boiling onsen eggs, or the area's charmingly cute folk toy "Hatoguruma," a dainty pigeon-shaped craftwork. Akebi vine grows between spring and autumn in Okushinano, a nearby mountain region at a height of 500–800 meters. In October and November, the few remaining local craftspeople harvest the vines by hand, picking each branch before soaking them for about twenty minutes in the town's hot spring water to make them more flexible and easier to weave. This classical handicraft dates back to the Edo period, when the vine branches were found to be perfect for making back-carried baskets and flower baskets. At Sankyu Kogei you can purchase a wide range of Akebi vine products, as well as participate in workshops to create your personal souvenir. There are two types of Akebi vine products: the red items are still in possession of their outer bark; the light brown ones were woven after having their bark peeled off, giving them a smoother texture.