

TITLE: Koyasan Koyamaki Protected Forest Area

The slopes of Koyasan are one of the few remaining native habitats of *koyamaki*, or Japanese umbrella pine (*Sciadopitys verticillata*). Although these slow-growing trees have existed for over 200 million years, and once grew widely around the world, most of the koyamaki forests died, or were destroyed, about two million years ago. Today, Japan is home to most of the world's remaining koyamaki. Due to preservation efforts and the designation of this area as a protected site, this forest on Koyasan has the largest concentration of koyamaki in Japan.

Koyamaki have no close genetic relatives and are the only members of their scientific family (*Sciadopityaceae*) and genus (*Sciadopitys*). For this reason, and because of their long history in the fossil record, koyamaki are sometimes referred to as “living fossils.” The trees produce seed-bearing cones that take over a year to mature, and their needles grow in a spiral shape that resembles an umbrella or a flower, giving rise to its common English name, “umbrella pine.” Its Japanese name, koyamaki, is a reference to Koyasan.

Because the koyamaki's beautiful spiral needles remain alive and fresh long after being cut, it is a long-standing tradition on Koyasan to use koyamaki branches in place of flowers in formal arrangements and as offerings at temples and graves.

In nature, the koyamaki's trunk and branches normally grow straight and tall. However, regular pruning can cause the tree to assume a gnarled or twisted shape. For this reason, koyamaki growing in protected forests or in the wild may look quite different from the ones that grow near temples, where their branches are regularly pruned for offerings and rituals.

Visitors can enjoy these beautiful, symbolic trees throughout the entire length of the Nyonin Michi (Women's Pilgrimage Route) and can also see them growing in the gardens of many temples in Koyasan.