

## Unique Plants in the Aso Area

Thanks to the unique natural environment of Aso's Caldera, a diverse range of nearly 1,600 plant species grow here. Of these, about 600 different plant and flower species are found in the grasslands. While many of these species can be seen throughout Japan, Aso is home to several rare plants and flowers that grow only in this area, including globe thistle (*Echinops setifer*), Oriental yellow violet (*Viola orientalis*), and clustered bellflower (*Campanula glomerata*).

Many plant species in the grassland areas are referred to as "living fossils" because they can be traced back to a time when Kyushu was still connected to the Asian continent. It is believed that these plants were native to northeastern China, making their way south through the Korean Peninsula during the Great Ice Age 300,000 years ago, and surviving today in the cool climate of the Aso region.

Flowers bloom in Aso throughout the year and are actively protected. This is done by limiting the spread of forests through controlled burning, mowing, and grazing. This allows plants to thrive across the grasslands. Conserving and regenerating the grasslands is a vital task. Without it, several of Aso's plant species would become extinct.