

The Vegetation of Ebino Kogen Highlands

Despite the volcanic activity and gases, a surprising variety of vegetation is able to not just put down roots, but thrive in the Ebino Kogen Highlands. The secret to this diversity is the subtle incremental changes in air and soil quality. While one plant might not be able to grow near volcanic vents, it might flourish just a short distance away.

Mongolian oak, Japanese beech, maple, and other tall trees grow along the nature trail that takes in the three crater lakes. Further out, around the Kawayu River, these deciduous trees thin and the forest is dominated by Japanese red pine, a tree better able to endure the poorer soil quality. Moving closer to Mt. Ioyama, the quality of the soil declines further, and the red pines start to thin.

Further up the roadway is Tsutsujigaoka, “Azalea Hill,” where Miyama Kirishima azaleas, as well as peegee hydrangeas and other shrubs grow. From here, the soil quality drops again, and Japanese pampas grass takes over, first growing thickly, but becoming gradually sparser closer to the volcano.

Nearing the volcanic vents, the pampas grass disappears, making way for a moss-like ground cover. In the immediate vicinity of the very active Mt. Ioyama, almost all vegetation disappears.

Photo Captions (Right to left, and bottom to top):

Thick forest grows where the land was once barren and rocky.

Miyama Kirishima azaleas and other small trees grow as soil quality worsens.

The soil becomes shallower, and Japanese pampas grass grows thickly.

The pampas grass thins as the soil quality declines.

Grass grows in soil created by moss.

In the cracks and cavities of the rock, moss grows: where all other vegetation may struggle, moss always finds a way to grow no matter how harsh the environment.