

Asagao Matsuri: Venue (Shingenji Temple/Iriya Kishimojin)

Shingenji, a temple of the Hokke school of Nichiren Buddhism, is better known locally as Iriya Kishimojin. The temple has stood at its current location since 1659, when the Buddhist priest Nichiyu purchased an inexpensive plot of farmland on the outskirts of Edo (present-day Tokyo) and built a temple to house a small wooden statue. Nichiyu had traveled to Edo from Kochoji Temple, the Hokke headquarters in what is now Shizuoka Prefecture, as a missionary tasked with relaying the teachings of his school to the capital's masses. The statue he had been entrusted with was a likeness of Kishimojin (Hariti in Sanskrit). According to Buddhist lore, the goddess Kishimojin had hundreds of offspring, but regularly abducted the children of others and fed them to her own. Determined to put a stop to Kishimojin's evil ways, the Buddha hid away her youngest child, giving the goddess a taste of her own medicine. Unable to bear this agony, Kishimojin swore to repent, and was transformed into a protector of all children and childbirth. Nichiyu's statue of this once fearsome deity remains at Shingenji, where it has survived both earthquakes and wars by virtue of being small enough to carry in one hand. The statue is displayed to the public on the 8th, 18th, and 28th of every month.