

Kamairi Tea

The Nishiusuki District that surrounds Takachiho is known for its *kamairi-cha*, a green tea made using a pan-firing process that draws out the depth of flavor of the leaves. While most green tea is prepared by steaming, *kamairi* tea undergoes a pan-firing process that gently heats, rotates, and massages the leaves, resulting in the characteristic rolled-up form of the leaves. Because the tea leaves are tightly packed in the pan-firing process, the tea does not oxidize, distinguishing it from other teas where the oxidation process is allowed to progress, such as oolong and other Chinese teas. Its color is lighter than similar teas while having a rich aroma. Production volume of the tea accounts for just 1 percent of all the other green teas grown on plantations throughout Japan. For years this small volume has meant that while *kamairi* tea is the staple beverage in the surrounding area, it is something special elsewhere. At present there are some 33 family-owned and operated plantations that continue to flourish by maintaining and preserve this precious legacy of tea.