

## Flowers of Tanto

The Tanto region is covered with broad swaths of farmland, making it ideal for growing flowers and other field crops. Tanto is renowned for its Tanto Tulip Festival in April, which features about a million tulips of over 300 varieties at the Tanto Flower Park. The highlight of this colorful festival is the stunning tulip art, which uses around 100,000 tulips to depict iconic Japanese themes, such as traditional *daruma* dolls, local mascots, and cartoon characters. Aside from the flowers, the family-friendly festival also features photo contests, a local bazaar, and food stalls.

After a tulip-filled spring, the area provides a haven in summer for many other flowers as well as for rice-field art, in which rice paddies are turned into canvases for art created by ancient grain plants. The rice field art showcases pictures created from five kinds of ancient rice whose plants grow in red, white, black, purple, and yellow. June brings the Okuaka Hydrangea Festival, and June and July the lovely sight of white *natsu tsubaki* (Japanese stewartia) clusters in Ankokuji Park. Sunflowers are the highlight of August, when the Tanto Sunflower Festival takes place at Tanto Flower Park. In autumn the trees on the surrounding mountains start to change into brilliant shades of red, orange, and yellow, while snow blankets the area with pristine white in winter.

The Tanto area is also home of Ankokuji Temple where the foliage of the *dodan-tsutsuji* (*Enkianthus perultas*) shrubs, including one approximately 160 years old, turns into a brilliant hill of color in the autumn. The temple illuminates the hill in the evenings to share its beauty all the more. The temple is also worth a visit during the spring when shrubs' new foliage comes forth in bright shades of fresh green.