

Plant Life of Oze

The area's distinct topography, geography, and climate conditions have created several ecosystems that host over 900 plant species. Oze lies at the intersection of four distinct types of vegetation: Northern, Southern, Pacific, and Japan Sea varieties.

Mountain Forests

The mountains surrounding Ozegahara are largely covered with deciduous trees, which vary depending on the altitude and the kind of soil. Japanese beech trees (*Fagus crenata*), with their off-white bark, are numerous in the Hatomachi-toge Pass area, for example, while the trail down to Yamanohana passes through forests of Japanese oak (*Quercus crispula*). At altitudes over 1,600 meters, coniferous trees such as Maries fir (*Abies mariesii*) and spruce (*Picea jezoensis subsp. hondoensis*) are more plentiful.

Very little light reaches the forest floor, and visitors with a keen eye may spot *ginryoso* (*Monotropastrum humile*), a plant with small white flowers that does not perform photosynthesis like other plants, instead getting its nutrients from fungi.

Mt. Shibutsu is not volcanic but largely made up of serpentinite, so named because of its snakeskin-like appearance. Due to the high magnesium and iron content of the rock, it is not conducive to the growth of many varieties of plants. One plant that manages to grow on Mt. Shibutsu is *ozeso* (*Japonolirion osense*), which takes its name from Oze. This, along with *Arenaria katoana* and *Leontopodium fauriei* var. *angustifolium* (see photos), are recognized as serpentinite-persistent plants.

Marsh Plants

During the spring and summer months the marshes are carpeted with flowers. *Mizubasho*, or Asian skunk cabbage (*Lysichiton camtschatcense*) is the first to make its appearance, covering many parts of the marshes in white from late May to mid-June. What looks like a white blossom, however, is actually a leaf called a spathe. The bright yellow-orange daylily called *Nikko kisuge* (*Hemerocallis esculenta*) is also a perennial favorite for visitors, appearing in mid-July. As the English name implies, the flowers only bloom for one day. Delicate blossoms appear on the stems of the *iwashobu* (*Triantha japonica*), an alpine plant that is thought to date back to the Ice Age.

Other plants frequently seen in Oze include the spongy *mizugoke* (bog moss) that holds

a lot of water, and cottonsedge (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) known as *watasuge*.

The pygmy water lily, or *hitsujigusa* (*Nymphaea tetragona*), is among the plants growing in the ponds and small lakes, along with *Ozekohone* (*Nuphar pumilum* var. *ozeense*), which has leaves like a lotus, but with yellow blossoms.