

### **【Bijinbayashi】**

The eerily straight, orderly trees of Bijinbayashi grew in the early 1910s, when the owner of the land needed money for his move to Tokyo. He decided to cut down all the beech trees and sell them as charcoal, after which he gifted the empty woodlot to the local farmers and moved away.

After the land was cleared, the thousands of beech saplings that remained were able to grow straight up toward the sun. Beech, which warps more easily than other trees, was not considered good-quality lumber at the time. The new landowner contemplated clearing the beech to plant cedar, which was more profitable, but he became enchanted by the beauty of the beech trees and decided to let them grow. The trees' tall, elegant silhouettes inspired the name *bijinbayashi*, meaning “forest of beauties.”

Beech trees flower every five to seven years, dropping their seeds in the autumn. Under normal conditions, the forest floor would be blocked by the canopy, and the seeds would die during the summer from lack of light. With the land completely cleared, the sun was able to reach the seeds, which grew straight up toward it.

The beech (*Fagus crenata*) is considered an alpine species, and it usually grows at altitudes of at least 1,000 meters. It is rare to find them growing here, at only 300 meters above sea level, but the climate's harsh winters and heavy snowfall limit the growth of competing species and allow the trees to thrive. Beech trees that grow on slopes are often bent into odd shapes by the weight of the snow.