

The Land of Fruit

Growing Fruit in the Minami Alps

While the upper slopes of the mountains are wild and forested, the city of Minami Alps and the surrounding area are covered in carefully tended orchards and vineyards. This is one of Japan's leading fruit production areas, growing cherries, peaches, persimmons, plums, grapes, kiwifruit, pears, and apples.

People have been growing fruit here for hundreds of years, thanks to the ideal weather conditions. The Minami Alps area gets plenty of rain in summer, has relatively dry winters and experiences sharp temperature swings throughout the year, helping to concentrate natural sugars in the fruit.

Peaches, Persimmons, and More

With the peaches grown in the Minami Alps area making up a large percentage of the total number that end up on plates in Tokyo, it is not surprising that the city has adopted the peach as one of its official symbols. Yamanashi Prefecture is also the largest producer of grapes in Japan, with some of the harvest being turned into wine in the city of Koshu, one of the country's oldest centers of wine production. There is even a local variety of plum called Kiyō which is listed by the Guinness World Records as the heaviest plum in the world—three times the size of a regular plum and weighing almost as much as an apple!

Another local specialty is a type of dried persimmon called *anpo-gaki*. While dried persimmons are a popular winter snack all around Japan, the cold, dry air flowing from nearby Mt. Yatsugatake transforms the local persimmons into a sweet, almost jelly-like treat that cannot be replicated anywhere else.

Orchards near the mountains are protected by high fencing to keep out wild monkeys that also find the colorful fruit irresistible. People, however, are welcome at fruit-picking farms, where for a small fee fruit-lovers of all ages can eat their fill of the local bounty.