

## **What Are Shrine Groves?**

Many Shinto shrines are surrounded by a sacred grove of trees, which is thought to be the domain of the divine and separates the shrine grounds from the secular world. These groves (*chinju no mori*) themselves can also be subjects of worship, as was often the case in ancient Japanese animism. While trees in forested areas near towns and villages are often used for firewood, most shrine groves have been maintained in their original state, as is the case at Tosashimizu's Kashima Shrine. The number of such groves has decreased significantly, however, as a result of urbanization and insufficient upkeep since the late 1800s. Nowadays, it is not uncommon to see shrines that are completely devoid of greenery. New groves, however, have been planted around some newly established shrines; the most famous example of this is the forest that surrounds Meiji Shrine in Tokyo, which dates back to the 1920s.