

## ***Wakame* Seaweed**

*Wakame* seaweed, a species of kelp, has long been an important ingredient in Japanese cuisine. *Wakame* harvested in Naruto is famed for its flavor and firm consistency. Though it also grows naturally here, the bulk of Naruto's *wakame* is cultivated, and is in fact one of the region's key revenue sources. The local *wakame* industry, with an annual harvest of roughly 6,000 tons, is the largest in western Japan and the third-largest nationally.

The whirlpools of Naruto are partly responsible for the superiority of the area's *wakame*, because the powerful tidal currents keep the plant in constant motion as it grows in the sea. The year-long production process begins on land with spring seeding; the seedlings are managed in large water tanks through summer. After they sprout in fall, they are transferred to the sea and carefully cultivated. Those grown close to where whirlpools appear will be particularly delicious specimens when the crop is ready for harvesting the following spring. *Wakame* is commonly used in miso soup and salads, or mixed with white rice in a simple dish called *wakame gohan*.