

**Local Plants: *Tobira* (*Pittosporum tobira*)**

This evergreen shrub was once believed to have the power to ward off demons. At Setsubun, an annual event observed on the last day of winter (according to the traditional Japanese calendar; usually February 3), a plant would be placed by the door (*tobira*) of the home in certain regions, giving the plant its name. This practice continues to the present day as a celebratory and decorative custom.

*Tobira* grows mainly along the coast, but sometimes on riverbanks, and in low mountainous areas inland. It has male and female varieties, and reaches a height of 2 to 3 meters. Its elongated oval-shaped leaves are smooth-edged and roll downward toward the rim. Around June, white flowers blossom abundantly at the ends of the branches, gradually turning from white to yellow. The *tobira* produces spherical fruits that ripen to a gray-tinged brown in October to November, splitting into three to reveal around 10 sticky red seeds.