

Local Plants: *Nezumisashi* (Temple Juniper; *Juniperus rigida*)

The temple juniper, which can be considered either a shrub or small tree depending upon height, is so named because it is sometimes used for decoration at Buddhist temples. The white smoke it emits when burned is effective as an insect repellent; in previous centuries, farmers would burn temple juniper outside buildings where cattle were kept.

An evergreen with male and female varieties, the temple juniper grows wild in hilly and low mountainous areas, with larger examples reaching around 10 meters in height and a diameter of roughly 30 centimeters. Its spiny needles, which appear in groups of three, can be sharp: they were once believed to ward off rodents, giving rise to the plant's name *nezumisashi* ("rat-stabber"). Around April, green flowers blossom beside leaves from the previous year: the male flower is oval, while its female counterpart is more elongated. The plant's spherical, meaty fruits ripen from green to dark purple.