

## Shiogama Spring

This small, gourd-shaped pool is the wellhead of Shiogama Spring, where 300 liters of cool water bubble up from the ground every second. The spring is 1.9 meters at its deepest point and stays around 11°C year-round.

Cold springs are often found near volcanic mountains, where rainwater seeps down through the andesite and hardened ash before emerging around the base. This spring lies at the foot of Mt. Naka-Hiruzen, and visitors sometimes stop at the fountain near the trailhead to fill their bottles as souvenirs.

The water of Shiogama Spring has a very low mineral content and is known for its pure, neutral taste. It supplies water to some 600 households. Other residents regularly collect it for drinking, cooking, and preparing tea and coffee.

On the approach to the spring, visitors may note a twisted straw rope with dangling white paper strips, an ornament that marks Shinto sacred spaces. Shiogama Spring has long been venerated by locals for its importance to Hiruzen's agriculture: as a tributary of the Asahi River, Shiogama Spring provides dependable water for irrigation. Every June 20, residents hold a ceremony to revere the spring's abundance and to pray for a bountiful harvest.

Some unusual plant and animal species make their home in Shiogama Spring. One of them is the *monoaragai* (*Radix auricularia japonica*), a freshwater snail distinguished by its wide-rimmed, translucent brown shell. In Japanese, the name means "the cleaning snail"—a reference to its consumption of algae and decaying organic matter, which keeps the pool crystal-clear.