

## Herbs

Herbs thrive in the subtropical soil of Yakushima, earning it the name “Medicine Island.” (*Yaku* is a homonym for the Japanese word for medicine.)

*Gajutsu* (*Curcuma zedoaria*), a variety of turmeric, has long been cultivated on Yakushima, as recorded in an Edo-period (1603–1867) document, the *Kusugawa monjo*. Zedoary root is used in Keimei Gashinsan, a brand of herbal medicine taken for stomach ailments, which is made at a plant in Kusugawa and shipped throughout Japan. The plant gives 30- to 50-minute tours showing how the medicine is produced.

Herbs are also very much a part of the daily diet of the islanders. *Kakaran-dango*, a mugwort-flavored rice dumpling wrapped in a China root (*Smilax china*) leaf, is a popular Yakushima snack. *Kakaran* is the local word for the leaf, but also a play on words in reference to the Japanese word for “not catching” an illness, and local residents say eating it will keep the doctor away. Other medicinal plants consumed on Yakushima include Okinawa spinach (*Gynura crepioides*), *botanbofu* (*Peucedanum japonicum* Thunb. var. *japonicum*), a variety of coastal hog fennel added to miso soup, and shell ginger (*Alpinia zerumbet*), a popular addition to tea.