

Taki “Thousand-year” Camellia

The Taki Camellia is an ancient Japanese camellia (*yabu-tsubaki*) tree located in a region formerly known as Taki. It is a precious relic of the camellia species found in the wild, preceding ornamental cultivars that are common today. Comparatively, the Taki Camellia blossoms are small, and they have a single layer of deep crimson petals surrounding a yellow center. The tree usually blooms between March and April, but the exact timing and volume of the bloom depend on climatic factors.

We will never know the exact age of the Taki Camellia, as the center of the tree and many of its growth rings have rotted away. Estimates based on the girth (3.26 meters) suggest it is between 500 and 1,200 years old. What is clear is that the tree has survived the centuries because of its location. Sturdy bedrock beneath the tree has protected it from landslides, and although the surrounding landscape is dotted with abandoned rice paddies, this particular spot was too steep for villagers to cultivate. Furthermore, the moist, partially shaded forest provides ideal growing conditions for camellias.

The tree was designated a Cultural Property of Kyoto Prefecture in 1989, and it now receives constant care. The land underneath has been fortified with stone terraces, and protective leather sheets are draped over split bark. Additionally, wooden supports hold the weight of heavy limbs.

Nearby there is a garden with dozens of camellia varieties, as well as the Kaya Camellia Culture Museum, which is recognizable by its camellia-blossom-shaped roof.