

Irodori Business

Kamikatsu supplies roughly 80 percent of decorative garnishes (*tsumamono*) used in Japan through a business initiative called Irodori. There is an extensive selection of colorful *tsumamono* to make Japanese dishes aesthetically pleasing and enhance seasonality, as Irodori's 300-product lineup shows. Many varieties have specific meanings or roles. Plum blossoms signal the arrival of spring, lotus leaves impart coolness in the summer, and red maple leaves create the feeling of autumn.

A cold wave destroyed the thriving mikan tangerine business in Kamikatsu in 1981. In the aftermath, Yokoishi Tomoji had the idea of collecting and selling leaves and flowers as garnishes to high-end Japanese restaurants. He founded Irodori to do just that in 1986, and it has since grown into a ¥260 million-a-year business. Approximately 200 suppliers are registered. Around 80 percent are women, and their average age is 70. The suppliers, despite their age, use smartphones and tablets to check which restaurants have placed orders and to compete with each other to fill them. Competition is key, as it takes fast thinking and reactions to accept orders before a competitor does. The supplier, after securing an order, goes to his or her field to pick the leaves or flowers, pack them, and ship them quickly to ensure timely delivery. Having a job has given older residents a positive mindset and more direction in life, and their story was made into the 2012 film, *Jinsei, Irodori (It's a Beautiful Life – Irodori)*.