

Unoha Shinji (Rabbit Flower Rite)

The Unoha Shinji is a festive rite commemorating Sumiyoshi Taisha's founding. It takes place on the first "rabbit day" in May, which most closely corresponds to the "rabbit month" in the ancient Chinese calendar. Priests make offerings to the legendary empress-regent Jingū, who is said to have established Sumiyoshi Taisha. These include branches of *Deutzia crenata*, a plant of the hydrangea family called *unohana*, or "rabbit flower," in Japanese.

The traditional Japanese time system was based on the ancient Chinese zodiac. Years, months, days, and nights were divided into 12 units named after animals. According to tradition, Sumiyoshi Taisha was founded on the first "rabbit day" of the "rabbit month" of 211, which was a "rabbit year." Rabbits have been associated with the shrine ever since.

A highlight of the Unoha Shinji is traditional dancing performed on the shrine's sixteenth-century stone stage.