

Mountain Cherry Trees in Toaka

The Toaka area of Shimogo has been a center of local forestry for centuries. The forests include more than 100 mountain cherry trees, as a result of the practice of *tomegi* in the area. The cutting of certain species of trees is prohibited in order to protect them. In Shimogo cherry trees were among the protected species, and many have been standing for more than 200 years. The practice is thought to have started around 1660, and harsh punishments were imposed on anyone who violated the prohibition. Due to the cold winters in the area, cherry trees bloom here somewhat later than in most of Japan, and usually reach their peak between late April and early May. Residents have long welcomed the pink blossoms after the harsh winter season, as harbingers of the coming of spring. Toaka's annual Mountain Cherry Blossom Festival is a popular event with visitors.