

Ancient Zelkova Tree

The zelkova tree (*Zelkova serrata* or Japanese elm) on the approach to Musashi Mitake Shrine is believed to be approximately a thousand years old. The tree is about 30 meters tall, with a circumference over 8 meters, and is likely one of the largest zelkova trees in Japan. A *shimenawa* rope with *shide* paper streamers has been placed around the trunk, signifying that the tree is sacred and that Shinto kami dwell within.

According to local stories, the tree was planted in the first century CE by the legendary warrior Yamato Takeru, the son of the twelfth emperor, Keiko. Trees that have survived over hundreds of years through wars and natural disasters are revered as symbols of resilience and as living connections to the past. Zelkova wood is prized among craftsmen for its durability, flexibility, and attractive grain. It is often used in traditional furniture, and for shrine and temple architecture.