

## Ojiya in Spring

In spring, the thick blanket of snow over Ojiya slowly melts, and vibrant flowers herald the end of winter. In April, thousands of cherry trees blossom in Funaoka Park and throughout the city. Bright yellow rapeseed flowers bloom on Yamamotoyama Highland in alternate years, depending on planting rotations.

At the Funaoka Park Cherry Blossom Festival, which is held from April to May, visitors can enjoy traditional music and dance performances under a flurry of blossoms. In the evenings, the trees in bloom are illuminated with paper lanterns.

During the Doll Festival (Hina Matsuri) in early March, ornamental dolls called *hina* are displayed in shops and homes. Hina Matsuri is observed throughout Japan to honor girls and to pray for their continued health and happiness. In Ojiya, unlike other areas, people put up *e-gami* woodblock prints on the walls around the doll displays. The prints hang on the walls like tapestries, depicting lively scenes of people and natural landscapes.

Spring brings the first *tsunotsuki* (traditional bullfighting) tournament of the year in May. Before the first match, purification rituals are held by a Shinto priest at the arena in the Higashiyama area.