

***Otazakura* Tree**

The sprawling cherry tree just left of the entrance to Honkakuji Temple in the village of Ogimachi is an *otazakura*, a rare species of late-blooming cherry with distinctively large petals. The tree is approximately 200 years old and blooms in mid-May. Its flowering traditionally provided a signal to local farmers that it was time to prepare for the growing season. The *otazakura* was recognized as a distinct species only in 1969, after the painter and amateur botanist Ota Yoai (1910–1988) visited Ogimachi and noticed that the tree at Honkakuji was different from all the other types of cherry he had come across before. Further studies confirmed Ota's claim, and the new species was named after the painter. There used to be another old *otazakura* on the right side of the temple entrance, but it died after heavy snow broke its branches in 1970. A shoot that sprang from the broken tree's roots was used to plant several smaller *otazakura* trees that now grow on the grounds of Honkakuji. Seeds from the original tree have been used to plant the species at temples and in gardens elsewhere in Japan as well.