

Shimoda Yew Tree

This lone Japanese yew tree (*ichii*; *Taxus cuspidata*) was once a symbol of the remote village of Shimoda. At the center of the village was Kakujunji Temple, the grounds of which included the now 200-year-old tree. The temple closed in 1887 due to a succession dispute, but Shimoda endured until the 1950s, when the seven families who had lived in the village's traditional *gassho*-style farmhouses moved away. Today, the 14.6-meter-tall yew tree—the largest of its kind in the Shirakawa municipality—serves as a reminder of the former village; most of the flat land in what used to be Shimoda has been turned into a pig farm.

Japanese yew trees grow very slowly, but the wood is relatively soft and easy to sculpt, and has traditionally been used as material for ornamental carving in the area covered by present-day Gifu Prefecture.