

Matsudaira-go Gongen Matsuri (Matsudaira Spring Festival)

The annual Gongen Matsuri at Matsudaira Toshogu Shrine commemorates the life of Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), the founder of the Tokugawa shogunate that ruled Japan from 1603 to 1867. Ieyasu was descended from the Matsudaira family, whose ancestral home once stood where Matsudaira Toshogu is now. Matsudaira Toshogu enshrines Ieyasu as the Shinto deity Tosho Daigongen (“Great Gongen, Light of the East”). The Gongen Matsuri is the oldest festival in Matsudaira-go. It is known to have been celebrated since the Edo period (1603–1867), although its original format is not clear.

The present-day festival is held on the weekend before April 17, the date of Ieyasu’s death. On Saturday evening, the priests of Matsudaira Toshogu draw sacred water from the Ubuyu Well behind the shrine and dedicate it to the deities. This water is believed to have been used to give generations of Matsudaira newborns their first bath. Drumming and dance performances follow the ceremony, and handheld *tezutsu* fireworks light up the night. *Tezutsu* are bamboo tubes wrapped in rope and filled with gunpowder that can blast sparks up to 10 meters into the air, and they are a staple of many festivals in Aichi Prefecture. They are thought to have evolved from similar devices used as signals on the battlefield in the time of Tokugawa Ieyasu.

On Sunday, a *mikoshi* (portable Shinto shrine) believed to contain the spirit of Ieyasu is carried from Matsudaira Toshogu up the hill to Kogetsuin, the Matsudaira family temple where the shogun’s ancestors are buried. Participants in the procession, all in period costume, enter the temple and say a prayer at the Matsudaira burial monument. The *mikoshi* is then carried back to Matsudaira Toshogu, concluding the festival.