

Lord Ogasawara's Peonies

The white peonies planted here have a history that stretches back nearly 500 years, to before Matsumoto Castle was built. Once the prized blooms of a sixteenth-century warlord, these peonies spent centuries in the care of a local temple before being returned to the castle grounds.

During the latter half of the sixteenth century, Ogasawara Nagatoki (1514–1583) ruled the Matsumoto region from Hayashi Castle, in the mountains to the east. Nagatoki's position was threatened by Takeda Shingen (1521–1573), the powerful ruler of neighboring Kai Province, who had begun moving to invade Matsumoto from the south. Nagatoki decided to abandon his castle and flee north, but he was tormented at the thought of Shingen's forces trampling and destroying his treasured white peonies.

To preserve the peonies, Nagatoki had them entrusted to the priests at Tosenji Temple nearby. Nagatoki was eventually defeated, and the peonies remained at Tosenji, where they were maintained through the years by a family of temple parishioners named Kuneshita.

It is thanks to the Kuneshita family that the peonies are here at Matsumoto Castle today. In 1957, the family presented some of the Ogasawara peonies (known to them as "the lord's white peonies") to Ogasawara Tadamune (1919–1996), the sixteenth head of the Ogasawara family. Greatly moved by the Kuneshita family's loyalty, Tadamune had the peonies replanted on the castle grounds. In 2006, the Kuneshita family donated several more peony plants, bringing the total to six.

In addition to the white Ogasawara peonies, pink and yellow peony varieties are planted around the enclosure. The flowers bloom in May.