

## Preparing the Raw Materials

Mino washi is prized for its durability and light, blemish-free appearance. To achieve this quality, the papermaking process begins with the careful preparation of raw materials. On display is the equipment for preparing the bast fibers, along with examples of the raw materials at each stage of the process.

A large metal cauldron on display was used for preparing the white inner bark of the *kozo* (paper mulberry) or *gampi* (several shrubs of the genus *Wikstroemia*), which are the main materials used for making washi. After the tough outer bark is steamed and peeled off the branches, the inner bark is boiled in the cauldron in a mixture of water and soda ash for around two hours. The soda ash helps to soften the bark fibers. Before soda ash was available, papermakers used ash made from rice husks and straw.

Next to the cauldron, branches of *kozo* and *gampi* are stacked, ready for boiling. Baskets of processed *kozo* inner bark strips and samples of beaten *kozo* pulp give a sense of the painstaking process involved in producing paper fibers.