

## Miyama Soba and Millet

Soba (buckwheat) is a staple of Miyama's cuisine and an eye-catching feature of the local landscape. It is a hardy plant that requires relatively little tending and is grown as a supplementary crop along the sides of rice paddies. In Miyama, soba began to play a central role in the late twentieth century when depopulation led to more and more rice fields being left unused. Soba grows densely and produces beautiful white flowers, and local farmers initially planted it in some of the vacant fields in the hope of making the scenery more attractive.

Miyama soba became noted for its taste as well as its beauty and is now considered a local delicacy. The Kitamura restaurant by the entrance to the Kayabuki no Sato village of thatched-roof houses serves hand-cut noodles made with soba from the surrounding fields. Seed is sown in early August when the area's rice farmers have some spare time before harvest season, and the fields are covered with a carpet of white flowers from mid-September. During the blooming season, photographers flock to Miyama to participate in the town's soba fields photo contest. Following the harvest in October, the year's new soba goes on sale in November.

Proso millet (*kibi*) is another grain that was traditionally grown in Miyama as a complement to rice and still appears on local menus. It requires less water to grow than rice and was often mixed with the staple grain to add volume to a meal. Modern uses include blending millet flour with soft, sticky rice to make *kibimochi*, a mildly sweet confection available at local cafes and shops.