

## **Nawashiro Zakura**

Two large cherry trees stand against a backdrop of evergreen forest in Wasa, a rural area of Gero. These are the Nawashiro Zakura, believed to be more than four hundred years old. Their springtime blossoms of pale pink are illuminated at night, casting their reflection upon the flooded rice paddy nearby.

The term *nawashiro* denotes a seedbed for growing rice seedlings. The trees are thus named because the villagers who lived in the area would begin their agricultural preparations when the trees were in bloom. The Nawashiro Zakura are alternately known as the Koyomi Zakura (“almanac cherry trees”) or the Yakushi-sama no Sakura, in reference to Yakushi Nyorai, the Buddha of healing and medicine.

The Nawashiro Zakura blossoms draw thousands of visitors each year. The taller tree measures 30 meters and is 4 meters in circumference; the smaller one is 25 meters high and 3 meters around.