

The Birthplace of Yurawase Mikan

Citrus groves cover whole hillsides in the town of Yura, Wakayama Prefecture. Many are for the cultivation of Yurawase *mikan*, a locally propagated variety of Satsuma orange (*Citrus unshiu*). Yurawase (*Citrus unshiu* Yurawase) ripen early and are harvested from late September, while the skin is still partially green. This is several weeks or months ahead of other, more typical *mikan* varieties. Yurawase have a soft, thin skin and bold, orange flesh divided into juicy segments by an ultrathin membrane. They have a well-balanced flavor profile that results from a high sugar content and equal levels of acidity.

The Yurawase *mikan* was first identified in 1985 by a local farmer who noticed that the fruit on a branch of one of his trees was coloring ahead of the rest. Tests and investigation over the course of a decade revealed the anomaly to be a new variety of *mikan* created by bud mutation. The parent cultivar was a Miyagawawase (*Citrus unshiu* Miyagawawase), one of the most common early ripening *mikan* varieties in Japan. The mutation had manifested in a single Miyagawawase tree from 270 that the farmer had planted decades earlier in 1960.

Today, Yurawase are grown across Japan, including throughout Wakayama Prefecture, but their roots remain firmly in the town of Yura. There is a monument to the discovery in the Miogawa district in the north of the town, where the mutation was first identified. Many of the citrus farmers in Yura grow Yurawase as well as other *mikan* varieties and other citrus fruits such as yellow *konatsu* oranges and grapefruit-sized *hassaku* oranges. Much of the harvest is sold outside of Wakayama Prefecture, but some fruit is sold locally or used in juices, jams, dressings, and other regional products.