

🌸 About the Minabe-Tanabe Region

The Minabe-Tanabe Region, which is located near the southwestern coast of the Kii Peninsula, has a population of 69,643 (as of December 2024). With a cultivation area of 3,969 ha and a harvest volume of 50,664 tons (2022 Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries statistics), it is the “number one Japanese plum production area” in Japan, accounting for about 50% of the domestic production volume. In particular, the Nanko-ume, which was selected as a regional standard variety in 1965, is loved as the finest umeboshi (pickled ume) and has become a top brand that represents Japanese plums.

🌸 What is GIAHS?

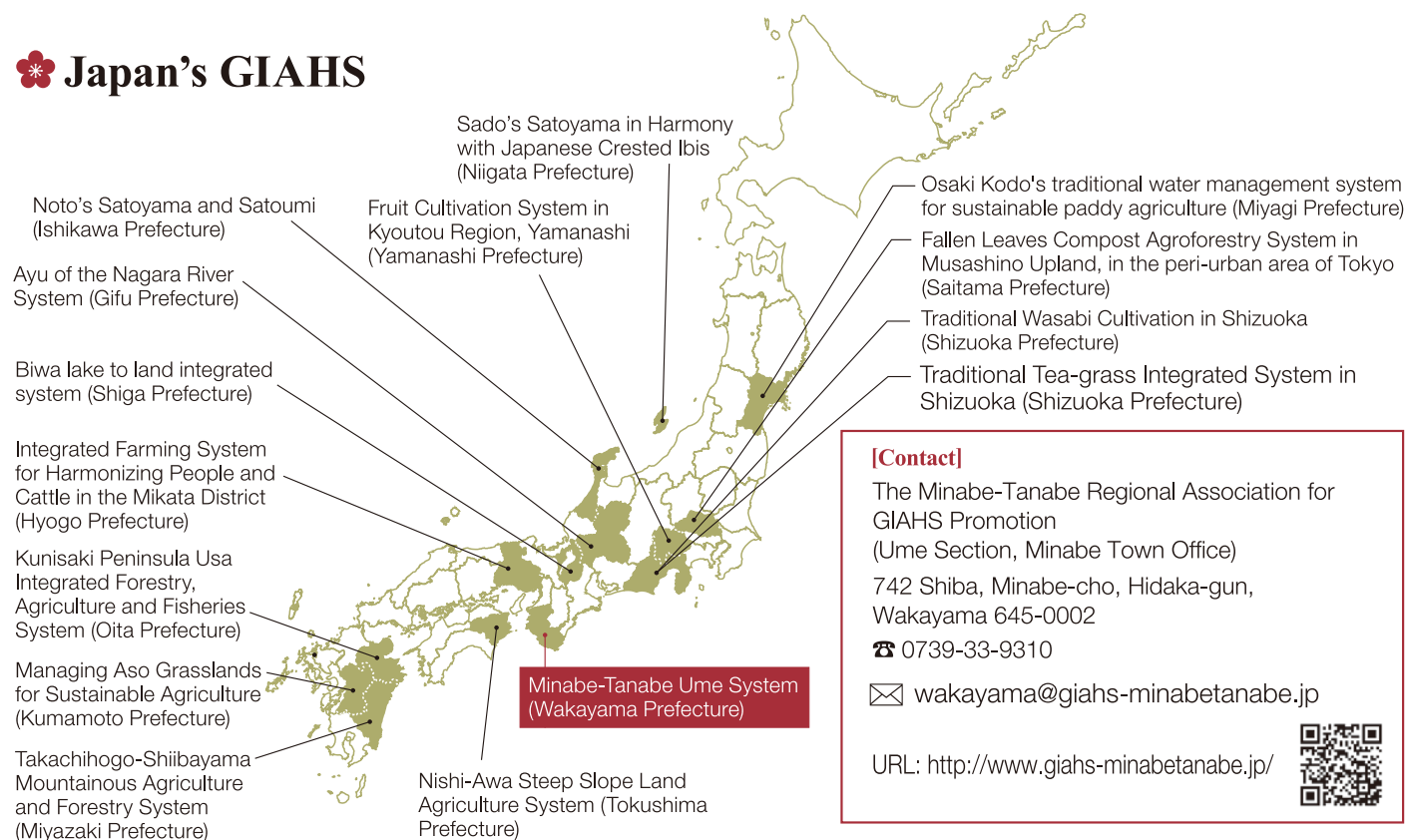
Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) is a certification system established by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in 2002 with the aim of preserving and passing on to future generations the traditional agricultural practices, rural culture and landscapes, and ecosystems rich in agricultural biodiversity that are being lost due to modernization, such as the shift to large-scale agriculture, crop improvement, and the mass use of chemical fertilizers. As regions of global importance for sustainable agriculture, 89 regions in 28 countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia (as of October 2024) have been certified, including the Oldonyonokie/Olkeri Maasai Pastoralist Heritage of Kenya and the Floating Garden Agricultural Practices of Bangladesh. The Minabe-Tanabe Ume System is one of 15 regions in Japan on the GIAHS list.



[Access]

The shortest way from Tokyo is by air. It takes about 1 hour and 15 minutes from Haneda Airport to Kumano Shirahama Resort Airport, and about 30 minutes by car from the airport to the area. It takes about 1 hour and 10 minutes from Haneda Airport to Kansai International Airport, and about 1 hour and 30 minutes from the airport to the area by train or car. It takes about 2 hours by train from JR Shin-Osaka Station, and about 2 hours and 30 minutes by train from JR Kyoto Station.

🌸 Japan's GIAHS



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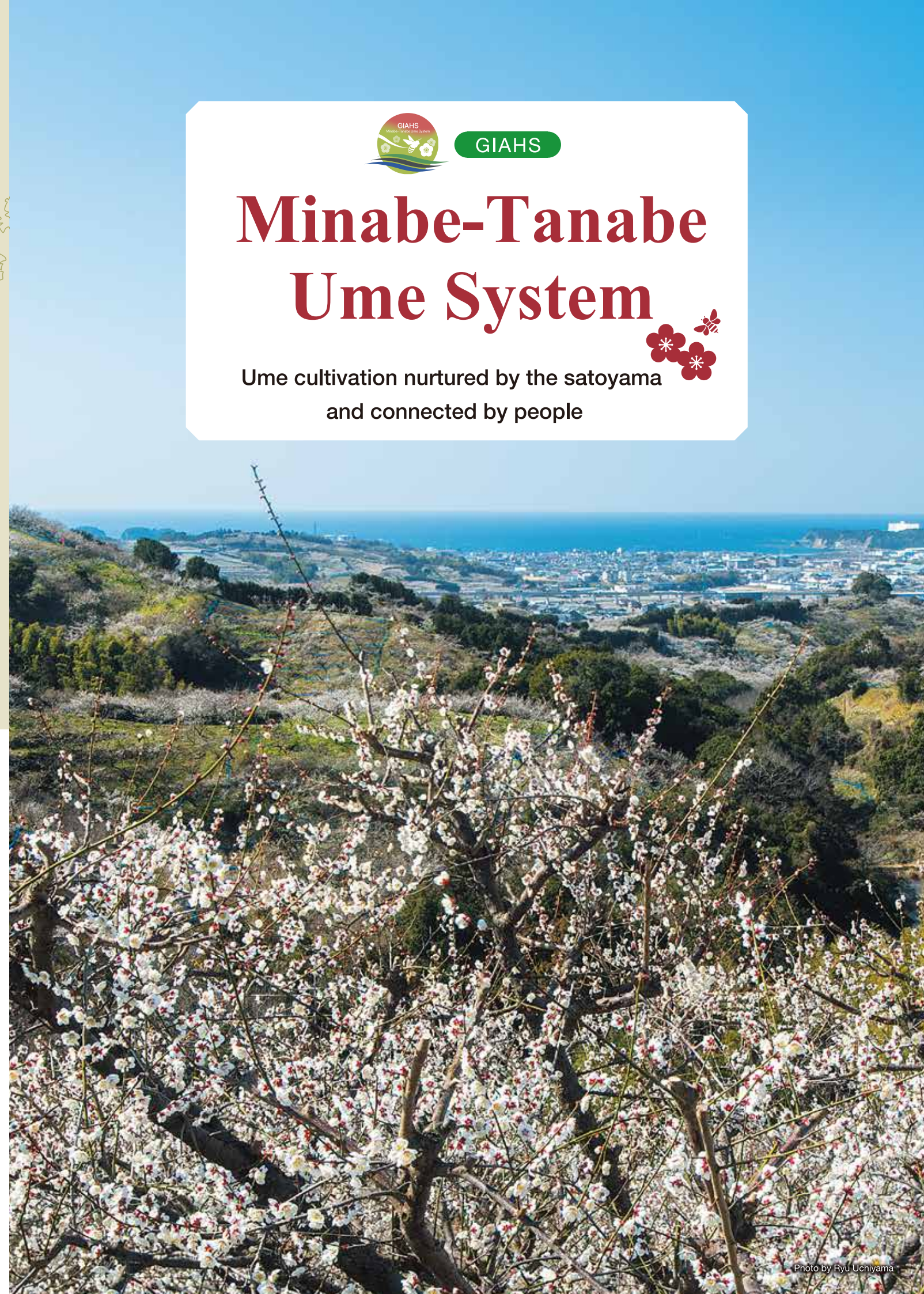
URL: <http://www.giahs-minabetanabe.jp/>



GIAHS

Minabe-Tanabe Ume System

Ume cultivation nurtured by the satoyama
and connected by people





The Traditional Minabe-Tanabe Ume System

In December 2015, a sustainable agricultural system centered on ume that has been passed down for 400 years was certified as a GIAHS. The Minabe-Tanabe Region where these ume are grown has received high praise for its production of high-quality ume while leaving coppice forests untouched and by ensuring watershed conservation and the prevention of slope collapses by locating ume orchards on mountainsides. The region has also been highly praised for its use of Japanese honeybees (*Apis cerana japonica*) to pollinate ume blossoms and for maintaining the abundant biodiversity of the region by preserving the natural environment of its satoyama and lowland satoyama areas.

1 Protecting mountains with Kishubinchotan charcoal “coppice forests”

The people of the Minabe-Tanabe Region have maintained the traditional custom of leaving the coppice forests untouched by using only part of the mountainous areas for ume orchards. Charcoal makers protect against destruction of the mountains by landslides and other disasters by selectively cutting the *Quercus phylliraeoides* (Ubame-Gashi in Japanese; “gashi” means “oak”) or oaks that they use as the raw material for Kishubinchotan charcoal. It is only through the diligent management and maintenance of these charcoal makers that the satoyama can be kept in a healthy state and sustainable agriculture and forestry can be maintained.



The *Quercus phylliraeoides* trees that are selectively cut by the charcoal makers using their practiced eye and time-honored techniques are fired at high temperatures of over 1000°C to produce hard, fine-grained high-quality Kishubinchotan charcoal.



Glossary

Coppice forests ► Forests for firewood and raw materials used in the production of charcoal. They are mixed forests located in satoyama regions that are composed of *Quercus phylliraeoides*, oak, *Quercus acutissima* (sawtooth oak), *Quercus serrata*, *Prunus serrulata*, hackberry, and other types of trees. They are managed and maintained through periodic upkeep provided by humans.

Kishubinchotan charcoal ► “White charcoal” that is made using a unique process in which *Quercus phylliraeoides* and oak wood are steamed at high temperatures and then covered in ashes outside the kiln in order to put out the flames. The Kishubinchotan produced in the Minabe-Tanabe Region has received high praise from professional chefs as the best charcoal available.

Watershed conservation ► Forest soil functions as a trap for rainwater and thereby ensure the water supply. Watershed conservation programs include efforts to control the water level in rivers in order to prevent flooding and maintain a stable flow rate of river water. As rainwater passes through the forest soil, the soil functions as a water purifier.

Selective cutting ► A method of tree pruning in which only the branches of the thickness required to make charcoal are cut during the trimming of “multi-trunk trees” that have more than one trunk. By leaving the thinner branches untouched, tree growth is allowed to continue, which leads to renewal of the forest.



Ume orchards have a different look in each season. Large numbers of tourists come to see the ume blossoms when they are in bloom.

Photo by Ryu Uchiyama

2 Ume grows thanks to pollination by honeybees

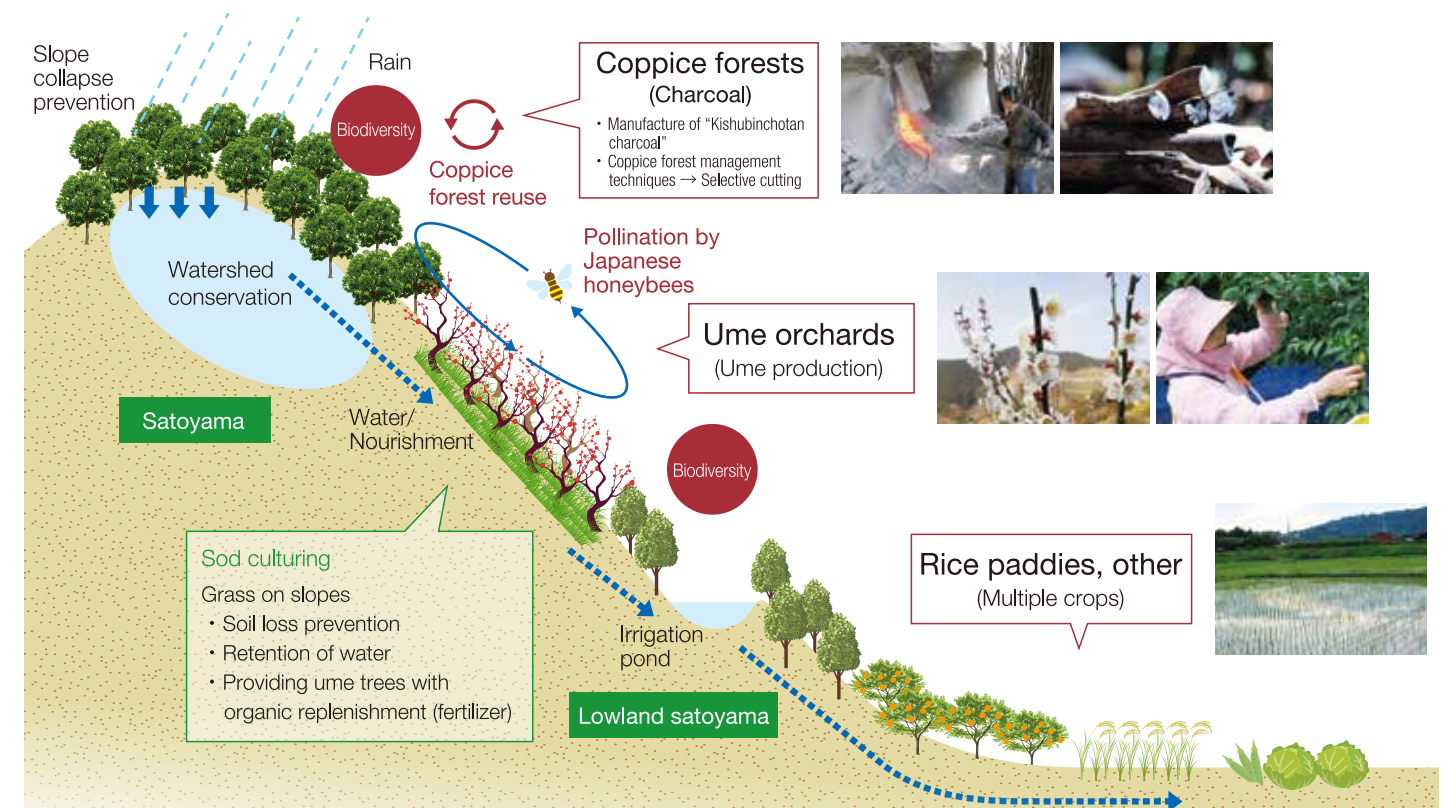
Most plum species are not self-pollinating and need to be planted close to other types of plum trees so that pollination can occur. Given that hand pollination is not feasible for hundreds of trees, the Japanese honeybee has been the preferred option since long ago. Plum blossoms, which bloom in early spring when there are few flowers, are a valuable source of nectar for the Japanese honeybees that live in the area, and they are preparing for the start of the full-fledged activity season. The symbiotic relationship between the plum tree and the honeybee has been recognized by GIAHS.

Glossary

Nanko-ume ► Ume that are raised and selected in the town of Minabe, Wakayama Prefecture. They are characterized by thin skins and an abundance of soft pulp. They are considered the finest type of ume for making umeboshi (pickled ume).

Japanese honeybees ► Honeybees that have long lived in the hills and fields of Japan. They are known to gather nectar from flowers from the spring until the fall. In recent years their numbers have been falling in natural forests, and as a result they are considered to be endangered.

Self-pollination (self-compatibility) ► Pollen from the one variety of plant arrives on the pistil of another plant of the same variety and results in pollination. Many varieties of ume have to be pollinated by different varieties of ume.



3 Ume harvesting and processing techniques are the secret behind high-quality Nanko-ume

Most plum growers in the Minabe-Tanabe region are also primary producers, pickling their produce to make shiraboshiume (salt-pickled ume) products. Therefore, Nanko-ume are raised to be good quality umeboshi from the cultivation stage. The processing companies are also very familiar with the appeal and characteristics of Nanko-ume. The close partnership between local growers and processors has also been recognized by GIAHS.



Nanko-ume destined for umeboshi production are not harvested until fully ripened. The farmers lay out nets on the sloping ground under the trees to ensure that the ripe plums are not damaged as they fall off the branch. This is also an efficient way to harvest the plums.

Glossary

Unripe ume/Ripe ume ► Unripe ume are ume that are not yet ripe. They are used to make ume liquor, ume juice, ume sour and other products. Ripe ume are fully ripe ume that are yellow in color. They feature soft pulps and a pleasant fragrance and are perfect for making umeboshi and ume jam.

Shiraboshi ► Shiraboshi is the traditional salty version of umeboshi that involves simply washing the harvested plums then pickling in brine. It can also be transformed into flavored versions, the people of Minabe-Tanabe maintain that the plain shiraboshi is the real umeboshi.

Flavored umeboshi ► Many processors produce different versions of umeboshi, made by extracting the salt content from the shiraboshi then introducing new ingredients or pickling in flavored solution. They can be found in a variety of flavors, including Shisozukeumboshi (perilla-flavored pickled ume), konbuumboshi (kelp-flavored pickled ume), katsuumboshi (bonito-flavored pickled ume), and hachimitsuumboshi (honey-flavored pickled ume).

4 Protecting diverse ecosystems from the coppice forests to the seashore

Sustainable farming in Minabe-Tanabe has nurtured a flourishing ecosystem with a wealth of diversity, supported by a healthy environment and good ground stability that generates natural resistance to runoff and slope collapse. The combination of plum and deciduous tree varieties at Minabe-Tanabe provides an ideal habitat for the sparrow hawk and northern goshawk, and also attracts visiting species such as the grey-faced buzzard eagle and honey buzzard. Meanwhile, the lakes and rice paddies nestled in amongst the mountains are remote enough to support rare species such as the Setouchi salamander and the Japanese fire belly newt. And the Senri-no-hama beach in Minabe boasts the highest spawning density of loggerhead turtles on Japan’s main island.

✿ Kishu Ume Association

Giving thanks for and passing on the blessings of the satoyama



The Kishu Ume Association, which is made up of municipalities, agricultural organizations, and umeboshi processor associations, has designated June 6 as “Ume Day.” This is because at an annual festival held at Kamo-jinja shrine in Kyoto on June 6, 1545, the Emperor at the time is said to have offered a gift of ume. Each year on June 6 ume are presented to Kamigamo-jinja shrine and Shimogamo-jinja shrine (both in Kyoto) as well as Suga-jinja shrine (Minabe Town) and Kumano Hongu Taisha Grand Shrine (Tanabe City) during a Shinto ritual held to offer thanks for the harvest.