

History of the Matsumae Cherries

Matsumae Town lies more or less at the extreme tip of the southernmost peninsula of the large northern Japanese island of Hokkaido, just to the west of the tunnel connecting it to the main island of Honshu.

In 1922 Mr Kanesuki Kamakura began to study the flowering cherries in Hakodate Park, Hokkaido and later to cultivate cherries at Matsumae Town, for which service he was later awarded the freedom of the town. In 1937, Professor Misao Tatewaki made a scientific study of the Matsumae cherries, work which later formed the basis of the cherry register compiled by Messrs Tanaka, and Asari.

In the late 1920s the flowering cherry was appropriated by the Japanese Militarist Regime and used as a symbol of the Japanese domination of the annexed territories in Korea, Manchuria, China, etc. The effect of this was to make the flowering cherry very unfashionable until the 1950s. During WWII many famous cherry viewing sites were destroyed for the Japanese war effort; however by 1951 many cherry festivals were springing up again.

In the 1950s Professor Sigeso Sugahara undertakes further research on the trees in Matsumae in shedding light on the cultivars of that region, a task carried on by Mr Masatoshi Asari.

In 1961 Japan's first park designed to display examples of many cherry cultivars was opened in Matsumae Town. Exchange of plants then took place with other cherry locations in Japan.

Mr Masatoshi Asari (1931 -)



Mr Masatoshi Asari is a flowering cherry specialist and breeder in the Matsumae

region of Hokkaido. He was born in 1931 in the town of Nanae, in the SW corner of Hokkaido. He was a teacher in an elementary school in Hakodate, Hokkaido, where he taught the children how to grow cherry trees on the island. His hybridisation work has resulted in the raising of some 105 new cultivars, most of which are still not readily available in the west. These cultivars are all denoted by the prefix Matsumae-. The importance of these new cultivars is that they been made in the north of Japan where the climate range is more akin to Western Europe. He is still alive and healthy, aged 79, as of December 2010. He has now retired but is still living as a specialist on flowering cherry trees. He has been given the title “Sakura Mori”, protector of the cherry trees”.

Currently at Keele there are some 48 different Matsumae cultivars. We have them because of correspondence between Chris Sanders and Mr Asari, which resulted in CS being supplied with propagation material. Very little or no information is available for most of these cultivars in non-Japanese sources. One or two have been taken up by nurserymen in Europe and often given non-Japanese names - ‘Matsumae-fuki is marketed as ‘Chocolate Ice’.

Acknowledgment

Information from the manual of flowering Cherries and personal communication from M. Franck Sandrin via. Chris Sanders.