

A SHORT GUIDE TO

JAPANESE TEA CULTIVARS

by intern Katrina Wild, #138



kyoto obubu tea farms



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ABOUT



kyoto obubu tea farms

It started with a single cup of tea. As the legend goes, one fateful day, Obubu's president Akihiro Kita, or Akky-san, visited Wazuka (Kyoto prefecture). At the time, Akky-san was still a college student in search of life's calling. After trying the town's Kabuse Sencha (a type of shaded tea), he immediately fell in love and his passion for green tea was born. He had finally found what he was looking for in that one simple cup of tea. After seventeen years of learning to master the art of growing tea from tea farmers in Wazuka, Kyoto Obubu Tea Farms was born and as they say, the rest is history. Obubu is the Kyoto dialect for tea. Now, Obubu means more than just tea to us. It means family, friends, passion, and the place we call home. Obubu is an agricultural social venture, whose philosophy stands on three following pillars:

- bringing **quality** Japanese tea to the world;
- contribute to the local and global **community** through tea;
- revitalize interest in tea and agriculture through **education**.



WAZUKA: TEA VILLAGE

Chagenkyo being Wazuka's nickname, means **the home origin of tea**, or Teatopia, as we like to translate it. In fact, Wazuka has cultivated tea since the Kamakura period, over 800 years ago, when Japanese green tea first came into existence.

The origins of tea in Japan can be traced to Buddhist monks returning from their studies in China. Japanese green tea was first developed in the 12th century, in the form of matcha. Eisai (1141-1215), the founder of the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism, wrote the first Japanese book about tea, entitled *Kissa Yojoki*, or *The Treatise on Drinking Tea for Health*, which described how to grow, process, and drink tea. Eisai's technique was to grind the tea to a powder and then whisk it with hot water.

It is said that the shogun at that time, Minamoto Sanetomo (1192-1215), suffered from alcoholism and that Eisai introduced him to tea as an alternative, which cured him. The shogun was impressed and spread the custom of tea drinking throughout his court. It was around this time that the first tea was planted in Wazuka (then part of Yamashiro province) on the foothills of Mt Jubu, in an area now called the Harayama Tea Fields. The site is within walking distance of the Obubu house, about a kilometer or so to the north, and features a beautiful, circular pattern of tea bushes.

Five hundred years after the first tea was planted in Wazuka, sencha tea was invented in Ujitawara, a town about 10 km northwest of Wazuka. Since then, Wazuka has traditionally been a mainly sencha-producing area.

Now, Wazuka produces about 2% of Japan's tea and has a reputation for especially high-quality tea with a savory umami flavor. About half of the tea produced in Kyoto is grown here, and more than half of Wazuka tea is made into matcha.



PREFACE

I am Katrina, my roots can be found in Latvia, however, I have been always moving for the last several years, while always having a few leaves of *Camellia Sinensis* in my backpack. I came to Obubu for the internship program in September - December 2022 to learn about tea agriculture and production. These three months have been filled with tea adventures, harvests, weeding missions, planting new life, processing evenings in the factory, packaging, tea tours, photography and video production, social media management, educational events, and so on. Amidst all of these intern activities, my personal project was about Japanese tea cultivars, thus, this short guide was born. As you can imagine, three months is a short time, especially, since autumn is a busy season at Obubu. Therefore, I would like to give a small disclaimer, that I would like to call this creation of mine "the first edition" as it needs to be revised and thoroughly completed. For instance, this guide includes only the cultivars that Akky-san and farmers associated with Obubu grow (i.e., not all of them are here since there are over 150), which is 15 cultivars + Zairai.



A lot more can be done given the incredible amount of resources available at Obubu: individual leaf comparison, describing various agricultural practices in Wazuka and Japan as a whole, asking Akky-san many more questions, comparing taste profiles, etc. Most of the available information about cultivars is also in Japanese, which wasn't easily accessible to me due to the language barrier, however, interviewing Akky-san was incredibly helpful, as well as the materials of Florent Weugue (Japanese Tea Sommelier) and Ricardo Caicedo (My Japanese Green Tea) are heavily referenced here.

I would love to think that the future interns who are interested in this topic would continue going deeper and use my work as a foundation to build upon (which I also shall continue to do). Let's hope that you will witness the second edition soon enough!

This is just the tip of the iceberg! Nevertheless, I hope that the information provided here is interesting and useful to you, dear reader!

WHAT IS A CULTIVAR?

As you might know already, all tea comes from the *Camellia Sinensis* plant, which has two main varieties for tea production: var. *assamica* and var. *sinensis*. And then, within those varieties, we have plants with unique traits, i.e., cultivated variety. A cultivar is a group of plants that have been bred to achieve desirable characteristics, thus, the plants share identical genetical compositions inherited from their mother plant. Tea is no exception and there are around 150 cultivars in Japan, both officially registered and unregistered. A good analogy of a cultivar would be the grape varieties for wine like Merlot, Chardonnay, Primitivo, etc. In the case of coffee: Blue Mountain, Bourbon, or Geisha. Fuji and Granny Smith for apples.

Cultivars can be suited to various weather conditions (frost-hardy or early sprouting, for example), or they can be cultivated for specific flavours or aromas. Some cultivars are habitually used for a particular type of tea – for example, sencha (good for open field cultivation) or matcha (shaded cultivation). However, you can make any kind of tea (green, black, oolong, etc) from any cultivar; it depends on how the tea is processed after harvesting.

Camellia Sinensis is a self-incompatible plant, which means that it has a mechanism that prevents the self-fertilization of the same flower or a genetically linked flower. This means the flower of a tea plant will not be able to produce a seed with pollen from the same tea plant, or from the same cultivar (since a cultivar is genetically the same plant, i.e., a clone). Therefore, to create and reproduce a tea cultivar, it must be two different tea plants (or two cultivars). For example, a Yabukita seed cannot produce a Yabukita tea plant. To get another Yabukita tea tree, you have to take a cutting from it - clone it.



cultivar

品種

(ひんしゅ)

HISTORY OF JAPANESE TEA CULTIVARS



The beginnings of Japanese tea cultivars are surprisingly recent and trace back to the last quarter of the 19th century. At that time, the tea industry and export were flourishing, as a result, it started to modernise, for example, many new mechanised technologies were introduced, as well as the idea of cultivar selection. Before, tea farmers practiced the traditional planting of indigenous tea trees, reproduced by seeds (genetic composition differs from plant to plant), known as Zairai ("native"). Therefore, the development of individual cultivars began by breeding these native plants. Individual bushes were selected for their desirable resistant, productive, aromatic, etc. qualities and then reproduced by cuttings, i.e., cloning.

In 1906, the famous and well-known Yabukita was selected in Shizuoka by Sugiyama Hikosaburo. Later, cultivars such as Asatsuyu or Sayama Midori were selected from Zairai tea plants in Uji. At the same time, tea plants from abroad also gave birth to new Japanese cultivars: in 1877, Tada Motonobu brought seeds from Assam, which gave birth later to the first Japanese black tea cultivar, Benihomare. Then, in the 1920s and onwards, crosses between cultivars started to take place. Selecting a cultivar takes approximately 20 to 30 years, where a single tea tree ends up being selected from thousands of other ones, following several phases of selection and testing. It was not until 1953 that a list of 15 cultivars was officially registered for the first time.

Now, although declining after its peak in the 1970s, Yabukita still represents 73% of the cultivated area, followed by Yutaka Midori 6%, Saemidori 4%, Okumidori 3%, Sayama Kaori 2%, Asatsuyu 1%, Kanayamidori 1%, and the rest being less than 1%. Only around 2% of Zairai native tea trees remain. Most cultivars are developed and selected in national and prefectural research centers, but some are also the result of selection by producers.

CHARACTERISTICS

Resistance to cold damage, certain pests, and diseases that affect the tea plant.

Robustness of the bush. Do the cuttings take well, etc.

Productivity and quality: a tendency to make leaves more or less heavy to increase the yield.

The budding period: Yabukita is the standard point of reference. A cultivar that buds before Yabukita is early-budding, and ones that buds after are late-budding. This is important for tea farmers since they can plan the harvesting times well in order not to miss the ideal time for harvest.

Aromatics and colour.

Types of tea to which the cultivar is mainly dedicated to. When registered, cultivars are classified for a specific type of tea production, sencha being the most numerous with more than 2/3 of the total cultivar count. Those categories are: **sencha**, **tamaryokucha** (steamed and pan-fried), **shaded teas** (tencha, gyokuro), **black tea**. For example, cultivars that are well-suited for gyokuro and tencha can withstand the strenuous process of shading in order to produce good umami. Cultivars for black tea have a lot of tannins. However, it is not very exclusive, since it is possible to make black tea with a sencha cultivar and vice versa.

Chemical and molecular properties (for example, the methyl catechin of Benifuki and its anti-allergic properties).





CATEGORIES

Kyoto / Uji

Most of the shaded tea cultivars come from Kyoto / Uji, the main gyokuro and tencha (matcha) production region, as well as shaded sencha (kabuse). Well-known examples include Asahi, Gokou, Ujihikari, Samidori, and Ujimidori. These cultivars have spread little outside this region.

Sayama

Sayama is the name given to teas from the Saitama prefecture, north of Tokyo. The research center located in Iruma developed many cultivars, including Sayama Kaori which is popular throughout the whole country. The development of resistant tea plants is a very important criteria in Saitama.

Miyazaki

Miyazaki in Kyushu is the 4th largest tea producer in Japan, and the research center of this region has selected many kamairicha cultivars (for pan-fried teas), for example, Unkai, Mine-kaori, Yamanami, and Tamamidori. In recent years, Miyazaki has seen a significant amount of new sencha cultivars registered, with Kirari 31, in particular, being voted for as a potential new standard alongside Yabukita and Saemidori.

Inzatsu

Inzatsu is the abbreviation of "Indo Zasshu", i.e., Indian hybrid. At the beginning of the 1920s, Maruo Fumio, a researcher at the Shizuoka Research Center, brought seeds of the Manipuli 15 variety from Assam that got crossbred with local Japanese cultivars and resulted in Shizu-Inzatsu 131. They often have a scent reminiscent of jasmine and grapes due to a high rate of methyl anthranilic acid.

Tada-kei Inzatsu and Black tea cultivars

In 1875, Tada Motonobu went to China and India for a year to research black tea production and bring back tea seeds of local varieties. So he ended up coming back to Japan with Assamica, which later became the first Japanese cultivar for black tea: Benihomare. It is the parent of Benifuki and Izumi cultivars. Hence, his name "Tada" in the "Tada-kei Inzatsu" category includes all of the descendants from these Assamica seeds. Other black tea cultivars outside of this category are the ones that came from Chinese seeds (Asanoka, Okuhikari, Karabeni, Yamanami), and even some from the Caucasus (at the origin of Minami Sayaka).

Shizu-7000 series

Those were selected at the Shizuoka Research Center from Yabukita seeds, however, the pollinating father plant being unknown, Shizu-7XXX cultivars were recorded in the late 1960s: Yamakai (Shizu-7166), Surugawase (Shizu-7109), Kurasawa (Shizu-7111), Fuji-midori (Shizu-7224), and Machiko (Shizu-7132).



ZAIRAI

在来

Is it a cultivar? A short answer would be: no. Cultivars are essentially clones because the tea plants are grown from cuttings (instead of seeds), and Zairai is grown from seedlings, which means that each bush has very different traits, features a slightly different genotype from its parents (a unique genetic code), and is not uniform. For example, if you plant ten seeds from the same bush, you'll notice some variation in height, colour, flavour, and yield. ZAIRAI translates as "native", which indicates that many of the Zairai tea plants are kind of "wild" and can be pretty old, in fact, hundreds of years old (as in, native to a particular area). Each Zairai plant can be very different in flavour, aroma, leaf shape, colour, etc. The diversity of these tea trees makes this variety suitable for organic farming, or farming without the use of pesticides. In the end, we have a very natural blend. The deep earthy aroma of a cup of Zairai can be attributed to its deep taproots and main root (clones have adventitious roots) and since the nutrients, minerals, water, and scent from the soil are more readily absorbed and retained. Additionally, Zairai tea trees are extremely resistant to diseases and pests.



OBUBU TEA: Sencha of the Earth, Sencha of the Wind

OBUBU TEA FIELDS: Tenku, Shimojima (in the photo), Koshigoe, Ie no Tonari, Ie no Ushiro



YABUKITA

やぶきた 【藪北】

YABUKITA (Yabu (藪), meaning bamboo grove, and Kita (北) meaning north) is the most famous and commonly used cultivar, comprising around 70-80% of the whole tea production in Japan. Why? It is high-yielding, frost resistant, adaptive to different climates and soils, and new shoots grow well, consistently, and relatively high-quality when harvested on time, however, susceptible to fungal diseases. Long and straight leaves, intense green colour. It was first cultivated in 1908 by a tea breeder named Sugiyama Hikosaburo (杉山彦三郎) in Shizuoka. Yabukita is often produced as Sencha, although it also can be processed into Matcha. The plant started to gain the attention of scientists in 1927 before being finally officially registered on the cultivar register in 1953. Since then, it is considered one of the easiest tea cultivars to grow according to its very good climate adaptation characteristics, yield, and balanced taste.

OBUBU TEA: Sencha of the Autumn Moon / Brightness / Summer Sun, Kabuse Sencha, Sakura Sencha, Tsubame / Suzume / Tsugumi Kukicha, Natural Gyokuro, Hachiju-Hachiya, Hoji-Wakoucha (Seed Grown Yabukita), Oolong Needles, Fern Shoot / Pine Needle Wakoucha, Frost Nightmare White tea, Kitchen Grade Matcha

OBUBU TEA FIELDS: Tenku, Jinja, Aoi Mori, Minamiyabu, Monzen, Obubu House, Erihara, Shimojima, Ie Mae, Kamiko, Somada, Hayashi, Michinashi, Himeno, Kawayoko, Jinja Oku



Obubu House tea field has 60 years old bushes grown from Yabukita seeds; and it features the honorary tea club member board

WHERE DOES YABUKITA GROW?

Did you know that Obubu manages 26 tea fields in Wazuka? No wonder Akky-san's nickname is "chairman without a chair" since we barely see him in the office: he can always be found in the fields or factory. Part of Obubu's mission is to rescue the abandoned tea fields and maintain them. It is very common in Japan since the average age of a tea farmer here is 65 years and oftentimes the next generation do not want to continue the agricultural business, therefore, sometimes there is nobody that takes care of them.



Tenku (Heavenly)

Tea Field

540 m altitude makes this field the highest of Obubu's farms

Aoi Mori (Blue Forest)

Tea Field

Obubu's Natural tea line. It is in the caring hands of the staff and interns to conduct wonderful tea experiments.



Jinja (Shrine)

Tea Field

Guarded by an ancient cedar tree and a shrine dedicated to it.

SAYAMA KAORI

さやまかおり

SAYAMA KAORI is a cultivar for sencha, which was selected from a Yabukita seed in Saitama and registered in 1971. The name was chosen as the cultivar was selected in the Saitama research centre (Saitama = Sayama) and the aroma is particularly notable. Its resilience and good yield once made it a success, however, its dark colour and astringency have caused it to lose some of its former popularity. Nevertheless, its astringency is part of its charm, along with its rich characteristic fragrance.

OBUBU TEA: Sencha of the Forest Glow

OBUBU TEA FIELDS: Monzen, Aoi Mori, Minamiyabu, Somada



WHERE DOES SAYAMA KAORI GROW?



Monzen Tea Field

Our **tea tour** field! Here you can witness the bottom sediment of what used to be Biwa lake. In the past, this kind of material was used for sharpening stones, however, now it is too soft. The good side of it: tea grows well here and the soil is rich in magnesium.



Somada Tea Field

Fun fact: there was a landslide at some point and the footprint of that is still visible.



UJIHIKARI

うじひかり 【宇治光】

Ujihikari ("Uji's Light") is an unregistered cultivar, nevertheless, it is not so uncommon in Kyoto prefecture. Like many of the cultivars developed in Kyoto prefecture, it is mainly used for gyokuro and tencha production i.e., shaded teas. It is a normal budding cultivar with medium vigour and yield. The leaves are thin and soft, resulting in gyokuro and tencha of good shape, colour, and lustre. When shaded, it offers a desirable marine aroma. Ujihikari has a slightly weak resistance to cold weather and a medium resistance to anthracnose.

Ujihikari is a very special tea for Obubu because Akky-san has grown those cuttings himself for the last 3 years, and our staff and current interns got to plant a new field this year. In a few years, we will witness the first harvest! That's why Akky-san started calling it Baby-chan tea field.

OBUBU TEA: Ujihikari Matcha

OBUBU TEA FIELDS: Baby-chan, Kominka





OKUMIDORI

おくみどり【奥緑】

OKUMIDORI (Late-Budding Green) has leaves with an elliptical shape similar to Yabukita, but a bit smaller. Although originally intended for sencha, it is now also being used for matcha and gyokuro. It's a late-budding cultivar, taking about a week longer than Yabukita before it can be harvested. The advantage of this is that Okumidori can resist frost that happens at the beginning of spring. Okumidori was developed in Shizuoka prefecture. It is a hybrid between Yabukita and a native tea cultivar called "Shizuoka Zairai #16" (静岡在来16号). When made into sencha, it is of mellow taste, astringency isn't high and the fragrance is refreshing. The liquid's colour tends towards pure green and the yellow hue isn't so present. A well-rounded tea cultivar with no serious flaws, however, Okumidori is sometimes criticised because it doesn't stand out as much since it's quite similar to the Yabukita cultivar. They are often blended, which proves the point.

OBUBU TEA: Okumidori Matcha

OBUBU TEA FIELDS: Erioshi, Aoi Mori, Monzen, Prison

Prison Tea Field

Named after the scary electric gate that guards this field.



OKUHIKARI

おくひかり 【奥光】



OKUHIKARI almost glimmers in the field with a slightly blue lustre! "Oku" stands for "late-budding" and "hikari" means "light" in Japanese, which represents the shiny nature of the leaf. In 1964 in Shizuoka, Okuhikari was the result of Yabukita cultivar being crossbred with a Chinese tea plant Shizu-Cy225 (静Cy225) from Hubei province. Its mature leaves are relatively big with a deep green colour. Okuhikari is quite resistant against anthracnose, blister blight, and grey blight, however, it is very weak against bacterial shoot blight. Its yield is similar to Yabukita but in comparison, it is more frost-resistant. As a sencha, Okumidori can be easily rolled into a needle shape. The processed leaf colour is bright green with attractive glossiness. The liquor is also bright green with a vegetal, refreshing, rich, lightly sweet, and spicy taste.

OBUBU TEA FIELD: Erioshi



UJIMIDORI

うじみどり【宇治緑】

UJIMIDORI is, as its name suggests, a tea plant variety originally from Kyoto Prefecture where it was selected in 1985 from a seed of Zairai (native) tea trees from Uji; "midori" means "green". Like all Uji cultivars, it is considered a shaded tea cultivar. The picking season is short. It has remained very rare, however, the most common production is shaded kabuse-cha or sencha, and more rarely: high-grade gyokuro or tencha. While umami might not be its strongest characteristic, it is famous for its aromatic traits like floral and creamy landscapes for the senses.

OBUBU TEA FIELD: Erioshi



YAMAKAI

やまかい【山峡】



Yamakai (Shizu-7166) translates as "Mountain Ravine". In 1967, this cultivar was one of the varieties that got selected and developed from Yabukita seeds at the Shizuoka Prefecture research centre: all of those varieties cultivated in the 60s are coded as Shizu-7XXX. It has rich umami and is popular for shaded tea production, such as gyokuro. However, its highly recognizable fragrance notes of melon and raspberries make it a fascinating unshaded sencha also. Time of harvest: early.

OBUBU TEA FIELD: Erioshi



SAEMIDORI

さえみどり【冴え緑】

Saemidori translates as “clear green” since the buds of this cultivar have a particularly excellent green colour, which produces fresh, sweet, high in umami, and bright green liquor with low astringency. Originally cultivated for high-quality sencha production, however, now it is also used for fukamushicha, matcha, and gyokuro. Saemidori is suitable for warm climates, therefore, it is mainly cultivated in the Kyushu region of southern Japan, especially in Kagoshima prefecture. Being an early-budding cultivar, it can be harvested 4 to 7 days earlier than Yabukita. In 1969, it was a result of the crossing of Yabukita and Asatsuyu cultivars to improve Asatsuyu’s shortcomings, which is of high quality but the quantity at harvest is low, plus, it’s very weak against frost. The colour, aroma, and taste of brewed Saemidori are very good, even at later flushes. It has a higher amino acid content (contributes to sweetness) than Yabukita, although the “natural gyokuro” property of Asatsuyu isn’t quite found in Saemidori’s brews. This cultivar has a yield (similar to Yabukita), but although reasonably resistant to some diseases, it’s very weak against others. Saemidori is susceptible to frost damage, and once this happens the bushes do not recover easily. Thus, in colder regions, there must be extra measures set in place to keep it healthy. The leaves of young Saemidori tea plants can be blown away by a strong wind, which will impede their growth. Thus, it can be quite challenging to grow this cultivar, however, it’s a highly successful hybrid that is getting more and more popular in Japan, and the tea produced is definitely worth it.

OBUBU TEA: [Sencha of the Gushing Brook](#)

OBUBU TEA FIELD: Monzen



GOKOU

ごこう

Gokou was selected from Kyoto prefecture's Uji native species (Uji-Zairai) and is mainly used for gyokuro and tencha, which ultimately results in matcha. It is not registered yet as an official cultivar, and yet it is not a rare cultivar. It is picked 3 days later than Yabukita, i.e, it is late-budding. Its original name was Kyoken-166-go (京研166号): Kyoto's research number 166. In 1954, it was cultivated at the Kyoto Prefecture Tea Industry Research Institute (京都府茶業研究所). Middle-sized leaves, the buds are light green with few wrinkles, and the yield is similarly large to Yabukita. Gokou is strong against cold weather and has medium resistance to anthracnose. Once shaded and processed, the tea leaves have a dark green colour, a notable aroma, and a strong umami flavour. Sencha made from this cultivar is quite rare, and while being remarkably different, it may not result in a superior sencha as it is more suited for shaded cultivation.

OBUBU TEA: Gokou Matcha, Heavenly Drop Gyokuro

OBUBU TEA FIELD: Kamo



KANAYAMIDORI

かなやみどり【金谷緑】

Kanayamidori, "Kanaya Green": Kanaya is the name of a past town in Shizuoka prefecture, which has become part of Shimada city. This cultivar is well known for making high-quality sencha. In 1949, the Yabukita cultivar was crossed with a tea plant called Shizuoka Zairai number 6 (静岡在来6号), which is also sometimes shortened as S6. Kanayamidori can be harvested 4 days later than Yabukita, making it a late-budding cultivar. While its leaves are slightly smaller than those of Yabukita, the yield at harvest is greater, and it has a strong cold resistance. Kanayamidori's profile could be described as dark green and glossy tea leaves, a delicate aroma that evokes a dense forest of conifers, a creamy texture paired with bright and vegetal qualities, making a refreshing cup with notes of lemon basil and kombu, and a smooth finish.

OBUBU TEA: Gyokuro Kanayamidori produced by Kenta-san from Hosoi-nouen



TSUYUHIKARI

つゆひかり 【露光】

In Japanese "tsuyu" means "dew", while "hikari" translates as "light". In 1970, at the tea research institute in Shizuoka prefecture, Tsuyuhikari was the result of crossbreeding Asatsuyu (あさつゆ) and Shizu-7132 (静岡7132). This cultivar is cherished for its umami, sweetness, and rich infusion colour. In terms of the cultivation area, it is quite rare, however, it is becoming more popular in Shizuoka prefecture. It can be harvested two days earlier than Yabukita, therefore, it is a slightly early-budding cultivar. The yield is greater than Yabukita and the young buds of this cultivar are pale green, while the mature leaves are darker green, elliptical in shape, and the edges aren't as serrated as in other cultivars. Tsuyuhikari is even better at resisting cold weather than Yabukita, it is very strong against anthracnose, and quite strong against blister blight, but susceptible to bacterial shoot blight. Once processed into sencha, Tsuyuhikari results in bright green leaves and liquor often described as emerald green. The colour is even richer if it's a fukamushi sencha and it also can make a good oolong. The aroma is fresh and slightly floral, and the taste has a good body and umami taste.

OBUBU TEA: Tsuyuhikari Tamaryokucha produced by Ohyama family in Nagasaki (one of our important supporters contributing to Obubu's Project N!)



SAEAKARI

さえあかり【冴え明かり】

SAEAKARI translates as "clear brightness", and this cultivar has been getting more and more popular among Japanese tea farmers in recent years. The intention behind its development was to improve the downsides of Saemidori. Although Saemidori offers good quality and a high yield, it can only be cultivated in warm regions because it is susceptible to frost damage. Therefore, in 1989, Saemidori was crossed with Z1, at the Institute of Fruit Tree and Tea Science (果樹茶業研究部門) in Makurazaki, Kagoshima prefecture. The name Saeakari derives from Saemidori ("sae") since it produces a high-quality tea under the brightness ("akari") of the summer sun. Saeakari is a vigorous cultivar and has a strong resistance to anthracnose, grey blight, and bacterial shoot blight, but it is quite weak against the blister blight and the white peach scale. It resists cold weather better than Saemidori, and yet, not as well as Yabukita. It is a slightly early budding cultivar, about 2 to 5 days earlier than Yabukita.



OBUBU TEA FIELD: Nakao (around 1400 baby trees were planted in 2020 for future Gyokuro production - the estimated harvest is in 2025)



Saeakari is good for shaded tea cultivation, especially Gyokuro, since its leaves roll easily into a thin and tight needle shape, and it produces good umami due to the high amino acid content in both the first and second harvests. It has a higher yield at the first and second harvests than Yabukita and Saemidori. Its first harvest is of comparable quality to both cultivars, while the second harvest is of better quality than Yabukita and Saemidori's second harvest. Once processed into tea, its aroma resembles steamed chestnuts, edamame, and corn.

MEIRYOKU

めいりよく【茗緑】

MEIRYOKU is known for its vigour since it is easy to cultivate and maintain, and it is as good at resisting cold weather as Yabukita. The yield is high and the quality of brewed tea is good with a pleasantly refreshing taste. The character 茗 "mei" is often used in Chinese when referring to tea, while "ryoku" translates as green, thus, it is mainly used for sencha production. In 1980, it was the result of crossbreeding Yabukita and Yamatomidori. It is a normal budding cultivar that can be harvested a day or two earlier than Yabukita. The downside of this cultivar is that it doesn't recover well after a bark split injury caused by frost. It is very strong against grey blight, and has a medium resistance to anthracnose. The caffeine and amino acid content is higher than Yabukita, while the catechin content is lower.

OBUBU TEA: Meiryoku Matcha (Tecchan's tea farm)

ASAHI

あさひ【朝日】

ASAHI translates as "morning sun" and originates from Uji city, which makes it a high-quality shaded tea cultivar (Tencha and Gyokuro). It is famous for its rounded taste, aromatic fragrance, and bright green colour of the liquor. Once processed as gyokuro, the leaves are dark green and reveal an elegant fragrance. A deeper steaming uncovers more depth and strength to the aroma and flavour, which gives this type of gyokuro a very powerful taste. Asahi is a normal budding cultivar. When shaded, the buds have a bright green color with luster and are big but thin. Its yield is medium and hand-picking is considered the best for this cultivar. Asahi has strong resistance to cold weather and medium resistance to anthracnose but it doesn't like excess humidity in the soil.

OBUBU TEA: Asahi Gyokuro (Hosoi Kenta-san from Hosoi-nouen)



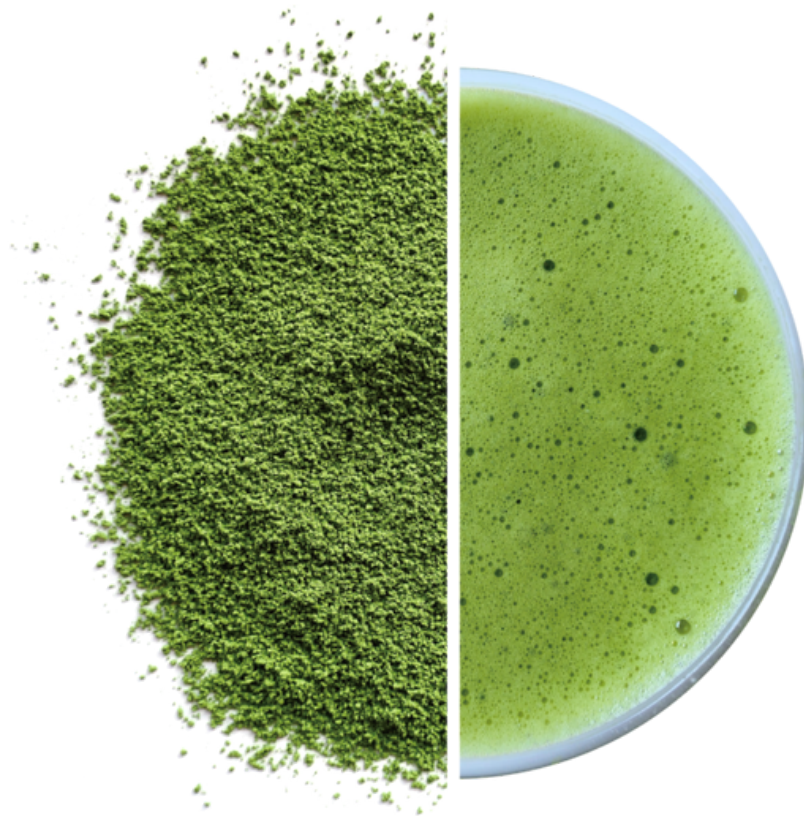
SAMIDORI

さみどり

Samidori is an unregistered tea cultivar that comes from the Uji region, therefore, as most cultivars from Kyoto prefecture, it is well suited for shaded tea production, such as gyokuro and matcha. It is a normal budding cultivar, which means that it can be harvested at the same time as Yabukita. Samidori has good resistance to cold weather and its strong quality is the long-lasting picking period. The young buds grow straight up, therefore, it is well-suited for hand-picking. The leaf colour is bright green with beautiful lustre. Its yield is slightly smaller than Yabukita, which means that it is still a good yield. Samidori is a bit weak against the grey blight and the white peach scale, and has medium resistance to anthracnose.

OBUBU TEA: Samidori Matcha (Tecchan's tea farm)

OBUBU TEA FIELDS: Petto (planted in 2019; in front of the dorayaki maker's shop who makes the sweets for our tea tours)





CULTIVAR COMPARISON SETS

The best way to learn and understand tea is to drink tea.

At Obubu, we have a few sets to help you get started!

GYOKURO

YABUKITA

Yabukita is not the best cultivar for shaded tea production as its umami is moderate compared to some other cultivars. Nevertheless, it gives this gyokuro a very interesting taste with a sharp umami and a refreshing clear after taste.

GOKOU

This gyokuro gives a delicate and aromatic cup with a nice, silky umami.

OKUMIDORI

Despite this cultivar is not the most popular for shaded teas production, this gyokuro turned out to have a powerful umami and a very well-balanced taste.

ASAHI

The needles of this gyokuro are dark green and reveal an elegant fragrance. A deeper steaming has uncovered more depth and strength to the aroma and flavour, which gives this gyokuro a very powerful taste.

KANAYAMIDORI

This gyokuro reveals a complex layered taste with a buttery texture and a round umami flavour.

MATCHA

OKUMIDORI

Rich and savory, Okumidori is delicately sweet with underlying elements of green pea and mango. Jade-green in the cup, it has a subtle coconut aroma.

GOKOU

Rich and creamy, Gokou has a light sweetness accompanied by notes of broccoli and peach. It has a beautiful emerald-green color and a lingering aroma of banana.

SAMIDORI

Silky and smooth, Samidori has a subtle sweetness with undertones of banana and rosemary. Its forest green colour is accompanied by a lovely avocado aroma.

UJHIKARI

Young and refreshing, Ujihikari cultivar offers this matcha a balanced bowl of matcha with light marine notes.

MEIRYOKU

Elegant and refreshing taste, lighter in umami.



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It would be quite impossible not to mention the wisdom of this ancient plant itself that has been enriching cultures all around the globe for thousands of years, bringing individuals and communities closer to one another, closer to nature, and closer to oneself. Thank you, **tea**, for being my North Star wherever I venture.

In loving gratitude,
Katrina



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