

JAPANESE SPRING BLOOMS ON THE DINING TABLE

As sunshine warms the days, Japanese tables are laden with gorgeous dishes. Traditional flavors that sparkle with artisanal skills quicken the hearts of people impatient for spring.

Registered by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage, Japanese cuisine is also praised as an expression of natural beauty and the passage of the four seasons. A supreme example is *nerikiri*, dainty confections molded into the shape of flowers and other symbols of the season. Amazing morsels are created by traditional, detailed handicraft from bean-and-sugar paste and given a variety of colors. The advanced artisanal skills and high aesthetic consciousness bring the delights of spring to the hearts and eyes of the beholder.

JAPANESE SWEETS



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SPRINKLED SUSHI

No flower-viewing party or spring banquet is complete without vividly colorful sprinkled sushi (*chirashi sushi*). Sushi rice, flavored with vinegar and sugar, is festooned with seafood, vegetables, and other treats, truly expressing the joy of welcoming a new season. With a different character for each region and household, even for Japanese people this is special. Schools, businesses, and other Japanese institutions start a new year in April. Everyone gathers around a table laid with festive foods and celebrates the season of new beginnings.



SAKE OF SPRING

Each regional Japanese sake has a unique taste. Determined to rise from the devastation of the Great East Japan Earthquake, the Tohoku region, including Fukushima, produces sake of high international renown, winning many prizes, such as the International Wine Challenge, the strictest in the world. Spring sake—perfect for pouring into each other's cups while appreciating cherry blossoms in full bloom—has a floral aroma, subtle sweetness, and glides gently down the throat. Brands with a pale pink color resembling cherry blossoms are also popular.