

How to Enjoy Hokkaido

How to enjoy Hokkaido on the cheap! Tips for visitors from abroad!



Luscious Asparagus

When friends from abroad visit me, they always say how delicious Hokkaido vegetables are. If you visit Hokkaido in late spring or early summer, please try the locally-grown *asuparasu* (asparagus), or for short, *asupara*. Greenhouse asparagus is in season from about late April to May, and field asparagus is in season from about mid-May to June. Freshly-picked Hokkaido *asupara* is delicious! It is fragrant, juicy, and soft. The secret lies in Hokkaido's unique climate. Places that are known for Hokkaido asparagus are *nairiku* (inland) areas. The large temperature difference between day and night gives the asparagus a lot of sweetness and umami. Today, asparagus is grown all over Japan, but Hokkaido is Japan's largest asparagus-producing region, with about 3,300 tons grown on average each year. In fact, the birthplace of Japan's asparagus is Hokkaido—in Iwanai. The town's mascot even carries a spear of asparagus! The story begins with the “father of Japanese asparagus,” Kikuzo Shimoda (1895-1970), a Japanese doctor of agriculture. Shimoda was the son of a farming family in Iwanai. After graduating from a *yaku gakkou* (pharmaceutical school) in Tokyo, he returned to Iwanai. He converted a room in his house into a laboratory and focused on developing new *hiryou* (fertilizers). He tested farmers' *dojou* (soil) and wrote *shohousen* (prescriptions) for fertilizer. Nevertheless, in 1913, these farms suffered a severe *sakumotsu* (crop) failure because of cold damage. Shimoda was shocked. He realized that Hokkaido agriculture needed more crops that would be *taikan-sei* (resistant to cold). He poured most of his family's income into this research, buying seeds of various cold-resistant crops from Europe and the United States. Among the crops he tried, Shimoda focused on asparagus. After much *shikou-sakugo* (trial and error), he succeeded in creating a variety of asparagus that was resistant to cold. Thanks to Shimoda's *eiyyutekina ketsui* (heroic determination), we can enjoy delicious Hokkaido asparagus in a number of dishes. As for me, knowing Shimoda's story, I will appreciate Hokkaido *asupara* even more!

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生産量日本一! 今が旬の「アスパラガス」

「野菜がおいしい!」北海道を訪れた外国人からよく耳にする言葉です。今の時期は「アスパラガス」がおすすめ。採れたてのアスパラガスは香り高く、ジューシーでやわらかいのが特長。昼夜の寒暖差が激しい北海道では甘みや旨味をたっぷり蓄えて育ちます。国内トップクラスの年間平均約3,300トンの生産量を誇り、中でも岩内町が一大産地で、日本におけるアスパラガス栽培の発祥の地といわれています。農家の息子であり農学博士の下田 喜久三氏(1895-1970)は、北海道でも生産可能な耐寒性のある作物の研究を進める中でアスパラガスに着目したそうです。栽培の歴史に思いを馳せながら、旬のアスパラガスをおいしくいただきますよう。

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