

ESG promotional content  
produced by The Japan Times Cube

# sustainable japan

## Looking ahead to Yokohama’s Green × Expo 2027

**Sustainable Japan Magazine**  
**MIAKI NAGAI**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Green × Expo 2027 (the International Horticultural Expo 2027, Yokohama, Japan) will be held from March 19 to Sept. 26, 2027 — 37 years after Japan last hosted a top-tier horticultural exposition, the International Garden and Greenery Exposition, in Osaka in 1990.

With the overarching theme of “Scenery of the Future for Happiness,” the expo will go beyond the conventional horticultural expo format to communicate and take action on solving global issues. The objective is to demonstrate the potential for a sustainable and happy society where flowers and greenery help us achieve harmony with nature. Held just three years out from 2030, the target year for most of the United Nations’ sustainable development goals, the event will contribute to the achievement of the SDGs by presenting a Japanese model for society beyond 2030 and communicating sustainable initiatives for the realization of a green society.

Since its opening as an international port in 1859, Yokohama has been a gateway for

trade in horticultural products, including the export of lilies and other plants from Japan and the import of Western flowers like roses and tulips. The expo will be held at the former Kamiseya Communication Facility located in the suburbs of Yokohama. This land once housed warehouse facilities for the former Imperial Japanese Navy, and after World War II it was requisitioned by the U.S. military and turned into a naval communications base. It was returned to the Japanese government in 2015.

Before the war, Kanagawa Prefecture, just south of Tokyo, was home to several military bases, along with military educational institutions and factories. After the war, the U.S. and other Allied forces seized those facilities and used them for stationing troops. Kanagawa was second only to Okinawa in terms of the number and scale of bases it hosted. Eighty years have passed since the end of the war, and the return of U.S. bases has progressed considerably, but as of 2022 Kanagawa still housed 12 U.S. military bases, comprising an area of approximately 17 square kilometers, according to its government.

The former Kamiseya Communications Facility, which was returned in 2015, is vast, covering 242 hectares — 100 hectares of which will host the expo. Because the



An artist's rendering of the planned main garden at Green × Expo 2027. The event will be held in the suburbs of Yokohama on a 242-hectare plot that was returned to the Japanese government in 2015 after being requisitioned by the U.S. military after World War II. Approximately 100 hectares will be used for the exposition. © JAPAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE INTERNATIONAL HORTICULTURAL EXPO 2027, YOKOHAMA

area was off-limits for such a long time, it is now considered a rich natural environment, including farmland and gently rolling grasslands, valuable natural assets like the headwaters of the Aizawa and Izumi rivers flowing to the north and south, and a picturesque valley. During the event, the expo site will be decorated with a wide variety of flowers and greenery. Industry professionals will exhibit gardens, flower beds, ikebana and Western-style flower arrangements, and new varieties of plants plus rare species. In the main garden, visitors will be able to enjoy the seasonal changes in blooming flowers, and in the gardens of overseas exhibitors, they will experience a variety of floriculture, horticulture and landscaping techniques from around the world, as well as distinctive exhibits from different regions.

The official status of the exposition ensures it will be well attended. Green ×

Expo 2027 is of the highest level of international horticultural exposition, the A1 class, and will be held with the endorsement of both the International Association of Horticulturalists (AIPH, headquartered in the United Kingdom) and the Bureau International d'Exposition (BIE, headquartered in France). International horticultural exhibitions are held with the aim of promoting horticulture and landscaping, the value of flowers and greenery to our lives, and also regional and economic development and opportunities to resolve social issues. Four categories of exposition are recognized: world horticultural expositions (A1 class), international horticultural expositions (B), international horticultural shows (C) and international horticultural trade expositions (D). World horticultural expositions must be accredited by the BIE, which was established under the Convention on International

Exhibitions, and can be called “international expositions.”

The International Association of Horticulturalists (AIPH) was founded in 1948, after World War II, by horticultural producers from various European countries with the aim of promoting their interests and advancing horticultural techniques on an international level. Its headquarters is in Oxfordshire, England, and as of 2022, it is composed of 77 horticultural and landscape gardening organizations and others from around the world. The first A1-class international horticultural exposition was held in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, in 1960. Since then, expos have been held regularly, mainly in Europe. The 1990 International Garden and Greenery in Osaka was the first to be held in Asia. In recent years, other expos have been held in China, Thailand, Turkey and, most

### Green × Expo 2027

The International Horticultural Expo 2027, Yokohama, Japan, the highest class of expo, will be held in Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture, from March 19 to Sept. 26, 2027.

The theme is “Scenery of the Future for Happiness,” and 10 million paying visitors are expected.

The venue is the former Kamiseya Communications Facility in Yokohama, which was formerly used by the U.S. Army as a communications base from the end of World War II until 2015, when it was returned to the Japanese government.

recently, in Doha, Qatar, in 2023, making them a truly global phenomenon.

Speaking of expos, Expo 2025 kicked off in Osaka in April. A forest has been created in the center of the giant wooden Grand Ring that demarcates the venue. Named the Forest of Tranquility, it symbolizes the kind of symbiosis with nature that society should strive for in the future. Pavilions are lined up around the forest, which covers an area of about 2.3 hectares and boasts some 1,500 trees. We human beings are sustained by nature and form part of the natural cycle of life. It is exhilarating to imagine what kind of “scenery of the future” will emerge at Green × Expo 2027, where planetary-scale issues like global warming, loss of biodiversity, natural disasters and food crises will all be firmly on the agenda.

This article was previously published in the Sustainable Japan Magazine, a monthly publication exploring sustainable lifestyle choices and the future of our planet. To subscribe to the magazine, scan the QR code.



## Muji has been sustainable from the beginning

**Mission: Sustainability**  
**OSAMU INOUE**  
RENEWS

The Muji Ryojin brand offers a wide range of products from clothing, household goods, furniture and food to even homes, all wrapped in a unique worldview. The brand adopted the name Muji in 1991, when its first overseas store opened in London.

Since then, it has gained recognition overseas and grown in 29 countries and regions.

Ryojin Keikaku is undoubtedly one of Japan's leading companies in sustainability. However, it differs slightly from the companies covered in this column in the past. The reasons for this are packed into its history, philosophy and products.

**History of eliminating waste**

Muji Ryojin was launched in 1980 as a lifestyle brand based on the concept of “cheap for a reason.” The name means “unbranded quality products.”

“It began as an antithesis to the trend represented by the term ‘economic bubble’ at the time, in which flashy goods and things were popular” said Kenta Hochido, Ryojin Keikaku's executive officer in charge of sustainability. “From the very beginning, we have continued to make products that are practical while paying attention to our ‘three principles’ — namely, selection of materials, streamlining of processes and simplification of packaging — for all of our products,” he added.

Since the 1980s, the company has always selected materials with an emphasis on quality, worked to streamline production processes, simplified packaging and decoration, and offered products at low prices.

Muji efficiently makes simple, good and low-priced products. Its philosophy and practices directly relate to the U.N.'s sustainable development goals and the practice of ESG (environmental, social and governance) management.

**Reuse and recycling**

After working on streamlining operations, Ryojin Keikaku began to work on reuse and recycling in earnest around 2010. It began by joining a project to collect clothes and recycle them into bioethanol. But after beginning to collect its old clothes, the company real-

ized many were still in good enough condition to be worn. Thus, in 2015, it decided to enter the reuse business, in which collected old clothing — excluding underwear, socks, shoes and bags — is cleaned, remade and resold.

The company launched “redyed clothes,” one-of-a-kind products made from collected clothes that are redyed indigo, black or other colors to add new value. It then expanded the lineup to include, for example, “connected clothes,” which are made by combining parts of different pieces of clothing.

“We have many customers passionate about the products, and many local governments appreciate them, because we take responsibility in giving a new life to our collected items,” said Rie Anan, Ryojin Keikaku's director of corporate planning.

Still, the company has faced challenges. Used clothes are collected at almost all of its more than 600 stores in Japan but sold only at 31 large stores. “The amount of clothes collected is still too small to be able to offer the products at all our stores. In other words, supply is not keeping up with demand,” Anan said.

But instead of stopping, Muji expanded the scope of items collected at its stores to include skin-care PET bottles in 2020 and plastic space organizers in 2023 — both of which are recycled into polypropylene for new products — and down comforters in 2024.

**ReMuji**

Ryojin Keikaku named these initiatives ReMuji and set up a circular business division to take charge of them. At the same time, it introduced a point system to accelerate collection at stores.

Some of its outlets have begun collecting used Muji paper clothes hangers, micro-bead sofas and metal shelves as well. These



Rie Anan, Ryojin Keikaku's director of corporate planning, and Kenta Hochido, its executive officer in charge of sustainability. © OSAMU INOUE

stores also collect unwanted items such as books and food, including items that Muji does not sell, and some donate them to day care facilities and food banks through local municipalities.

The “second founding” of the company was declared by Nobuo Domae, currently Ryojin Keikaku's chairperson. He set a 2030 target of realizing a “community-based business model centering on independent management of stores” and redefined the corporate purpose. Until then, the company had been committed to manufacturing good products in line with its “three reasons,” but now it added the focal points of “community” and “society.” Sales increased 46% over the three years after Domae became president.

Ryojin Keikaku is a remarkable company in that all of its products have been sustainable from the very beginning. The company has always focused primarily on the honest pursuit of the Muji way, and that is why it does not prominently display the SDG logo as a show of sustainability-mindedness and why it does not pledge to make itself carbon-neutral, though it is making efforts to improve external evaluations.

“Our goal is to become a leader in ESG by 2030,” Anan said. Given the potential of Ryojin Keikaku, which is arguably a pioneer of sustainability brands, it has a good chance of gaining recognition as the leader in both name and reality.

### Sustainable Japan Award: Satoyama Excellence Award

**EMI MAEDA**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Nestled in the mountains of Kyoto's Tango region lies Wakuden no Mori, a place that is far more than a tourist destination or a fine-dining spot. It is an ecosystem where people and nature support one another toward building a sustainable future. This forest sanctuary was founded by Aya Kuwamura, whose life story intertwines deeply with the land.

In 2024, her company Murasakino Wakuden received the Excellence Award in the satoyama category of the Sustainable Japan Award, organized by The Japan Times. The project was recognized for transforming cleared land into the forest in a way that fostered regional engagement, created local employment through a food workshop, museum and restaurant, and added value to local ingredients through integrated production, processing and marketing.

Murasakino Wakuden was founded in 1870 as a traditional *ryokan* inn in Kyoto in 1982, opening the *ryotei* (traditional Japanese fine-dining establishment) Kodaiji Wakuden. It flourished and became widely celebrated, yet her heart remained tied to Tango. “I always wanted to give back,” she recalled.

Wakuden no Mori began not with a grand vision but a desire to repay the land

that had nurtured her. After consulting with local officials, Kuwamura was introduced to a plot of land — once a mountain, now a cleared slope. Untouched by industrial pollution, the site was perfect for food production.

It was then that she encountered the work of Akira Miyawaki, a plant ecologist known for his “Miyawaki method” of rapid afforestation through mixing and densely planting a number of varieties of plants native to an area. Kuwamura adopted the method and, starting in 2007, planted about 30,000 saplings with the help of people from the local community and across the country. Kuwamura likens the forest to a modern *chinju no mori* — a sacred grove traditionally believed to protect local communities. “By bringing this forest back to life, I believe it can help shield the land from major disasters,” she said. The forest flourished, transforming rapidly into a thriving grove that now sways gently in the mountain breeze.

But this forest is not just for conservation. Regenerative agriculture is also being practiced in the terraced rice fields nestled in the mountainous area of Ichinono, Kyotango. Visitors participate in seasonal rice planting and harvesting. The rice — known as *Wakuden-mai* — is cultivated using natural fertilizer enriched with crab shells, a nod to Wakuden's iconic grilled crab dish. This rich organic compost infuses the rice with natural sweetness and depth. In addition, Isehikari rice — a rare variety once thought to have disappeared — has been revived, and people from other regions are invited to join in rice planting and harvesting, helping to strengthen ties between rural communities and outside participants.

A wooden art museum devoted to artist Mitsumasa Anno, Mori no Naka no Ie, designed by renowned architect Tadao Ando, sits quietly embraced by the forest. Known globally for his bold use of concrete, Ando here created a cedar-clad structure that melts softly into the landscape — an architectural homage to Anno's delicate watercolor worlds. In addition to exhibitions, the pavilion also serves as a venue for musical performances and cultural gatherings, offering moments of shared beauty in harmony with the forest.



Visitors take part in planting rice seedlings by hand in the paddies. © WAKUDEN



Front view of the corridor at the second workshop in Kumihamo, Kyotango, WAKUDEN

Wakuden no Mori reflects Kuwamura's quiet belief in the power of human connection, an idea she has cherished for many years. She embraces the saying “*Enjin kimyō, tāhō shōin*” (meaning associating with good people brings good results), which embodies a traditional Japanese view of human bonds: Relationships built through sincerity and humility can bring unexpected opportunities and shared purpose. This forest, shaped by countless such encounters, stands as a living testament to that spirit. “The encounters aren't by our power alone. We find ourselves led to them,” she said. “And things fall into place when you keep moving forward with sincerity.”

She also cherishes an old saying passed down from her mother: “A basin of water flows back to you when pushed outward, but if you try to pull it toward yourself, it slips away,” a reminder that selfless action eventually returns as blessings — that what we do for others will one day return to us.

“As long as you have a clear intention, and you value the people you meet, something will always move forward,” Kuwamura said. In the quiet of Wakuden no Mori, the seeds of harmony between people and nature are already taking root.

The Sustainable Japan Award commends individuals, companies and organizations who have made advances in sustainable efforts. To learn more, scan the QR code.

