

Remarks by H.E. Mr. HAYASHI Hajime,  
Ambassador of Japan to the UK,  
for the Opening Reception of  
“Japan Festival”  
at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, on 7 October, 2021

Mr Deverell and Distinguished Guests of this evening,

Just like many events starting these days, we stand here one year later than we had originally thought due to the pandemic. Yet as we come here and absorb these surroundings and look at all that Kew have achieved in putting on this festival, it is without doubt that it has been worth waiting.

Kew’s connections to Japan is extensive and longstanding, and the organisation has an impressive expertise in the highly developed and complex nature of Japanese horticulture, championing it over many years. In as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, plant collectors from Kew recognised that Japanese horticulture was highly developed and of global importance, and some of the great specimens growing in Kew were collected at that time. Alongside that, impressive structures of cultural importance stand within these historic gardens. Of particular note is the Chokushi-mon of Nishi Hongan-ji Temple in Kyoto, a replica of the Gate especially designated to the Imperial Messenger. The Gate arrived at Kew after being exhibited in the 1910 Japan-British Exhibition at White City and later a Japanese landscape garden was added with Her Imperial Highness Princess Sayako officially opening the new gardens in 1996. A perhaps lesser known feature of the gardens is the Minka-house, a traditional family dwelling which is set in the Bamboo

grove. The grove has played host to the Japanese festival of *tanabata*, known as the Star Festival in English, which has been co-organised by Kew, the Embassy of Japan and the Japan Society for many years, allowing children and grown-ups alike to enjoy Japanese music, crafts and stories within the ethereal space. Events such as these are indicative of Kew's ongoing commitment to Japanese cultural experiences and celebrating these remarkable features that are set in the grounds. I hope that visitors to Kew can continue to be delighted by their contact with the culture and traditions of Japan, and that this festival will stimulate the interest of all who attend.

Kew's global roles in science, research and preservation is contributing to paving the way to a sustainable future; a mission whose significance cannot be overstated. The role in preserving nature is one that both Japan and the UK empathise with. I have come to know very well in my time here that British people have an attuned sense for their natural surroundings, and a deep appreciation of nature. This is a characteristic that is shared with the Japanese, whose culture is deeply rooted in nature. Take, for example, the custom of enjoying the autumn foliage, *momijigari*, which Kew have incorporated in to the festival for people in the UK to enjoy.

With the world grappling the crisis of a pandemic, there is, now more than ever, an acute understanding that global collaboration will be key to mitigate the negative consequences of climate change. As we approach the COP26, we do well to remember our shared appreciation of nature, and how deeply we treasure it, as we re-organise our economies to a sustainable future. If we keep in mind the shared appreciation of nature that our two nations hold so dearly, we set the foundations upon which closer collaboration can bear fruit. That is why Japan at Kew Gardens holds a unique place in the cultural landscape, connecting our shared love of nature with our desire to engage with cultures beyond our own, and it is with the greatest of pleasure that I am in the UK to witness this marvellous feat.

I would like to conclude my remarks by expressing my sincere appreciation to Horticulture and Programming teams of Kew who organised this festival, and to Daikin UK and other supporters for making this event possible. It is my hope that you not only enjoy your evening here tonight, but that you encourage all of your friends and family to come and experience Japan, here in Kew Gardens, for themselves.

Thank you very much indeed.