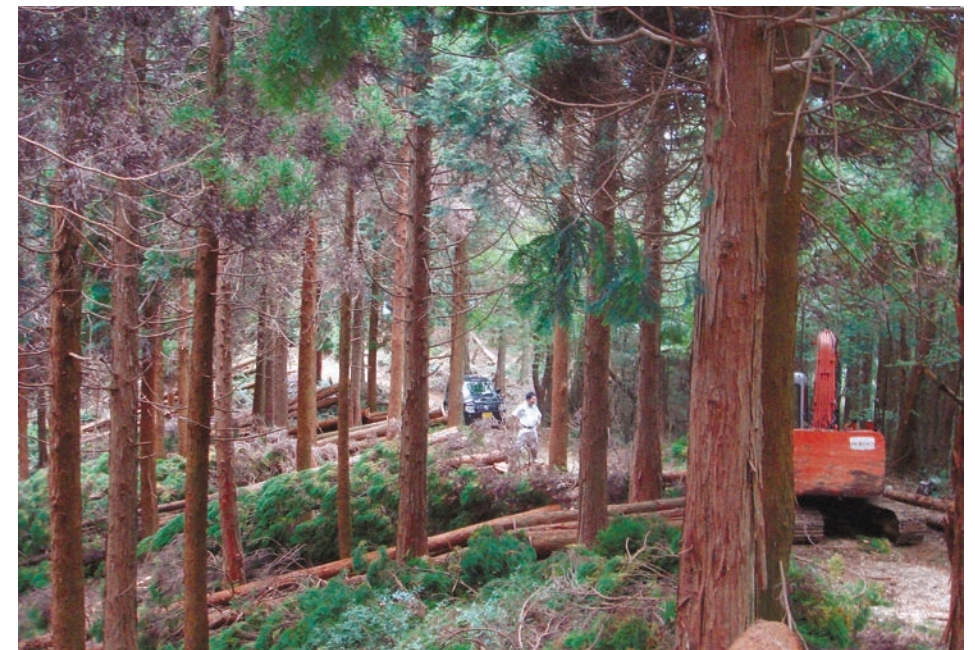


Forestry for the future

(Sponsored content)



Left: Planted forests have a long history in Japan. Right: Large-diameter logs are stored at a log market in Mie Prefecture.



Left: Felled trees cover a sugi forest after thinning work in Kumamoto Prefecture. Below: Freshly cut logs of Japanese cedar are stacked before shipment in Tochigi Prefecture.

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make an effort to promote exports. According to 2023 data from the Statistics Bureau, Japan's declining birthrate and rapidly graying population have caused its population to shrink for the past 13 years. However, the global population is rising and expected to approach 10 billion in 30 years, based on the latest forecast by the United Nations. There are countries with pressing demands

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for housing due to population growth, immigration, or damage from disasters and conflicts. Yamada, who has traveled across the world to learn about forestry, has seen people living with no roofs over their heads and thinks that any solution needs to be affordable and sustainable. "I think that the demand for timber has been growing in parallel to the increase in the world population and the global GDP (gross domestic product). It is the responsibility of the entire forestry industry to supply the timber needed to meet this demand from well-managed forests, and I believe that Japan can play a part in it," Yamada said.

Conservation pays off

While Japan has been harvesting timber from planted forests for centuries, there were many countries in the 20th century that exploited natural forests.

"In the 21st century, people started to realize the finite nature of the Earth. With the rising fears and awareness of resource depletion, the world has been shifting away from cutting down natural forests and trying to achieve a stable supply of timber from planted forests," Yamada said.

According to The State of the World's Forests, a comprehensive report on forests and conservation published in 2020 by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, the total of the world's forested areas comes to 4.06 billion hectares and the area of forest designated primarily for production is estimated at 1.15 billion hectares in the 160 countries, representing 93% of the world's forest area. However, about 93% of the total of the world's forested areas is

made up of naturally regenerating forests and planted forests account for only 7%. But not all of that is for logging.

The report states that approximately 45% of the planted forests are plantation forests mainly composed of one or two tree species of equal age managed for productive purposes, similar to the planted forests that have been managed in Japan. The other 55% of planted forests are intended for ecosystem restoration and protection of soil and water.

"The 10 million hectares of planted forests that Japan created in the post-war period accounts for as much as one-thirteenth of the total planted forest area available for commercial use worldwide," Yamada said. "Of the 10 million hectares, 4.4 million hectares of sugi, 2.6 million hectares of hinoki, 1 million hectares of Japanese larch (*Larix kaempferi*) and 0.7 million hectares of todo fir (*Abies sachalinensis*) would be especially useful."

Japan's role is to utilize these resources to contribute to the lives of those who can benefit, Yamada said.

However, wood materials are not something that can be exported anywhere overnight, and Japan has been paving the way for this sales campaign by getting ahead of the red tape.

"We needed to have our timber evaluated based on objective criteria. That is why we began preparing to have Japan's cypress dimension lumber certified by the American Lumber Standard Committee about five years ago, which bore fruit this April," Yamada said.

Targeting global markets

Although each country has its own set of standards for importing lumber, Yamada sees the acquisition of an American certification as a precedent for approaching other countries in the future. With the aim of entering the global market, the association chose to proceed with its hinoki marketing push in the U.S.

"The reason why we chose this wood was because there are a few tree species similar to cypress in the United States whose data are available. Having counterparts that we can refer to make a comparison has enabled easier and faster completion of testing and evaluation," he said.

The association is also aiming to get sugi certified by the American Lumber Standard Committee next year, even though it outranks hinoki in terms of plantation area.

The reason why the association put hinoki first is because the cedar is an endemic species in Japan and lacks data for comparison in the U.S.

"Actually, sugi has a price edge over hinoki," Yamada said. Based on the most recent data published by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the price difference between a 10.5 centimeter by 10.5 centimeter 3-meter piece of sugi after it is processed and dried is ¥19,000 cheaper than processed and dried hinoki of the same size. The price difference is even bigger when the timber is not dried — sugi is ¥22,600 cheaper than hinoki.

The healthy cycle of maintaining planted forests is based on the healthy economic cycle of generating economic value by utilizing trees as a resource and using part of the profit to regenerate them.

Yamada quickly cited the many advantages of Japanese cedar. "It can be processed easily. It cuts well in the direction of fiber, but it is also elastic at the same time, so it does not break easily. It doesn't rot easily and it is highly transportable because of its lightness."

The decline in the availability of western red cedar often used for fences and decks in the U.S. is generating interest in

sugi as an alternative.

Yamada said hinoki and sugi have many uses aside from dimension lumber. Both can be used for interior work ranging from walls, flooring and paneling to fixtures and furniture.

Looking to the future

Yamada is excited about the future of Japanese lumber beyond its current expansion to the U.S. market.

"The country that has been facing the greatest shortage of lumber supply is China. Japan has a geographical advantage in trading with China and there is already fair amount of container traffic in between the two countries," he noted.

He hopes to launch a new era in Japan's long history of lumber and planted forests.

"I want to create an era in which people in the world find various ways to use sugi and hinoki, appreciate their values and pay what they are worth. Considering the shortage of resources the world is facing, I believe that the lumber we have available in Japan comes as an attractive and valuable resource," he said.

It costs money and effort to maintain forests, and without adequate profit there won't be enough human resources in the sector or owners who are willing to take good care of their forests.

According to the Forestry Agency, about 65% of the planted forest land in Japan is privately owned. The health of these forests depends on the owners' will to maintain them, but Yamada pointed out that many owners are getting too old to do the work required or are young inheritors who are



not that interested in what they own.

Unless the owners are conscientious individuals who are aware of the environmental significance of these assets, the global challenges created by lumber shortages and the economic value of lumber, it will make no sense for them to maintain them either with their own hands or by outsourcing the work if they don't feel it's worthwhile.

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"Maintaining forests is not as hard as you may think," said Yamada, who is also

an owner. "You just need to go and check your forest once a year or so, thin the forest if you think the trees are too crowded and cut vines if there are too many of them tangling on the trees and so on," he said.

Protecting this centuries-long cycle of producing and nurturing high-quality lumber will keep the forests healthy while helping to preserve natural forests around the world amid growing demand for timber.

This article is sponsored by the Japan Wood-Products Export Association. For more information, go to their website at <https://www.j-wood.org/en/>



The beauty and strength of hinoki (left) and sugi make them excellent for building houses and furniture.



The town hall in Kiso, Nagano Prefecture, is built with hinoki and other varieties of lumber.