

A Calendar of Words

Seasonal words for November

Mid-November typically brings the first frost of the season, or *hatsushimo*, to the Kanto region. Frost is the white layer of ice crystals that form on the ground when water vapor condenses on a clear, cold night. First frost is usually observed sometime around mid-October in Hokkaido, late October in the Tohoku region, and between late December and early January in the Shikoku region.

Frost crystals are also called *souka* (*sou* = frost, *ka* = flower), because they look like beautiful white flowers. The kanji character for frost is also used in the term *souhatsu* (*sou* = frost, *hatsu* = hair), which refers to gray hair. *Soushin* (*sou* = frost, *shin* = to communicate) is another name for goose, because geese come flying around the time frosts begin to occur, as though to announce the frost season. *Shimoyake*, or the red swelling, itching, and burning frostbites that occur at the tips of one's hands, feet, and ears from poor blood circulation at low temperatures or from using cold water during the wintertime, is spelled in kanji using the characters for frost (*shimo*) and burn (*yake*).

The frost notwithstanding, November has one of the least fluctuations in daily weather conditions within the entire year, and is mostly blessed with balmy autumn days known as *koharubiyori*. It is thus an ideal month to venture out into the beauty of nature.

さいじき ことばの歳時記 がつ き ご ～11月の季語～

11月も中旬になると、関東地方では「初霜 (はつしも)」が降ります。霜とは晴れた寒い夜に地面の水蒸気が結晶して白く地面に付着したものです。初霜の降りる時期は、北海道で10月中旬、東北地方では10月下旬、四国地方では12月下旬から1月上旬とされています。

この霜の結晶を、白い美しい花にたとえて「霜華 (そうか)」とも呼びます。また白髪 (しらが) の比喻で「霜髪 (そうはつ)」という熟語もあります。「霜信 (そうしん)」とは、雁 (が) の別名で、霜がおりる頃になると、雁がそれを知らせるかのように飛来するからだそうです。また、寒さによる血行障害や冬場の水仕事で、手、足、耳等の先端が赤く腫れて痛がゆくなったり、熱く感じたりする「しもやけ」は「霜焼け」と書きます。

その反面11月は、1年のなかで気候の変化が少なく、いわゆる「小春日和 (こはるびより)」の日々が続くため、多くの人々が自然の美しさを求める行楽に適した月でもあります。