

# A Calendar of Words

## Seasonal Words for February

The traditional Japanese name for February is *kisaragi*. In kanji characters, it is commonly written 如月, but because it is a month when the cold weather returns and people put on more layers of clothing, it is sometimes also written 絹更月 and 衣更月, where 絹更 and 衣更 both mean “more clothes.”

According to the calendar, however, *risshun*, or the first day of spring, falls in early February. The days gradually become longer, and spring draws near through a cycle of alternating cold and warm days (as a common Japanese saying puts it, “three cold days are followed by four warm days”).

Following *risshun* is *usui*, another of one of 24 seasonal divides in Japan. It is not widely known, but it describes the time of year when snow and ice melt into rainwater. From around this time, the coldness passes its peak, the first spring storm blows through Japan, and the chirping of the bush warbler begins to be heard in certain regions. Since ancient times, farmers took these signs of spring to mean they must start preparing their fields for planting.

With the first warm wind of spring, plants and trees begin to bud. Therefore, February is also called *kusakiharizuki* (month of plant and tree growth), *umemitsuki* (month of plum blossoms), and *konometsuki* (month of tree buds). The expression “February flees” is also used to describe the month of February, because it has the least number of days and the month seems to pass by very quickly.

As the cold and warm days have begun to alternate frequently, you can be certain that spring is right around the corner.

# ことばの歳時記

さいじき  
がっ き ご  
～2月の季語～

2月の別名を如月（きさらぎ）と呼びますが、寒さがぶりかえし衣を更に着る月ということから、「絹更月」や「衣更月」と綴ることもあります。

ただし暦の上では、寒さがあけて春に入る日とされる「立春」を迎え、だんだんと昼が長くなり、三寒四温（寒い日が三日ぐらい続くと、そのあと四日ぐらいは暖かい日が続くこと）しなから、徐々に春に向かっていきます。

また、立春と同じく二十四節気のひとつである「雨水」。あまり知られてはいませんが、氷雪が溶けて雨水となるという意味で、この頃から寒さも峠を越え、春一番が吹き、鶯の鳴き声が聞こえ始める地域もあり、昔から農耕の準備を始める目安とされてきました。

春一番が吹くと、草木の芽が張り出す月であることから、2月は草木張月（くさきはりづき）や梅見月（うめみつき）、木目月（このめつき）などの別名もあります。

ちなみに2月は、カレンダーの日数が一番少ない月で、あつという間に日にちが経つことから、「2月は逃げる」と表現します。寒さと温かさが交互に入れ替わりながら、春はずぐそこまでやって来ています。