

For ancient agrarian societies, quirky winter weather – occasional warm days followed by blizzards and icy rain – was more than just an inconvenience or topic of casual conversation. A sudden sleet storm could mean severe crop damage, even failure. Many cultures developed pre-spring farming rites to insure successful autumn harvests. The origins of Hina Matsuri, Japan's Doll's Day Festival are linked to such a ritual.

On the lunar-based *koyomi* calendar, the third day of the third month was believed to be the best time to prepare the earth for new life to grow. Before planting seed, farmers and villagers would make simple paper dolls (*hina ningyō*) to which they would "attach" their troubles and fears. They would then float the dolls down rivers beginning to swell with melted snow. There are still a few places in Japan where the old custom of *nagashi-bina* (literally, "float-away dolls") persists.

The dolls made by most townspeople, however, were so beautifully crafted it seemed a shame to let them float away. The thrifty-minded 17th century merchants of Edo (the former name for Tokyo) began to save the dolls, displaying them each year in lieu of sending them downstream.

In households with young girls the custom of displaying dolls from mid-February is common. Family and friends gather to enjoy viewing the display of dolls. Pastel-toned, scattered-style sushi is served to guests with clear clam broth. When the party is over, it is time to put the dolls back in their boxes, though the day's excitement makes it hard for little girls to do. The inevitable fuss ensues and mother sternly warns daughter (as, no doubt, she had been admonished several decades before by her own mother) that any girl whose dolls are not put right away will be an old maid.

### うれしひな祭り *Ureshi Hina Matsuri*

Follow this link to hear the lilting song <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YORBK20mX74>

明かりをつけましょ ぼんぼりに

*akari wo tsukémasho bonbori ni*

(let's light the lanterns)

お花をあげましょ 桃の花

*ohana wo agémasho momo no hana*

(let's decorate with peach blossoms)

五人ばやしの 笛太鼓

*go nin-bayashi no fuétaiko*

(five musicians, playing flutes and drums)

今日はたのしい ひな祭り

*kyo ha tanoshi hina matsuri*

(Happy Hina Matsuri Doll's Day Festival)



The dolls sit serenely on a seven-tiered dais that has been draped in regal red cloth. At the top, the prince holds his *shaku*, a paddle like stick symbolizing his mandate to rule, while the princess sits demurely to his left, holding her fan.

- Three ladies-in-waiting
- Five musicians
- Two advisors (one young and strong, the other old and wise)
- Three inebriated courtiers (one laughing, one crying, one quite angry)

In addition, miniature lanterns, potted fruit trees, furniture and other items that might have been found in the 12th century Heian court, are on display.