

2021 August

## Column

### Annual Events in Japan

### Admiring the Harvest Moon

In Japan, the harvest moon is typically celebrated on the 15th day of the eighth month of the traditional Japanese calendar, when people gaze up and wonder at its beauty. In a location that allows a clear view of the moon, people will offer round moon-shaped *tsukimi dango* ("harvest moon-viewing rice dumplings") as well as taro potatoes and other seasonal vegetables in an expression of gratitude for the latest harvest. Since offerings of taro potatoes are made, the moon at this time is also known as *imo meigetsu* ("potato harvest moon"). The offering table is decorated with Japanese pampas grass to protect crops from evil spirits and natural disaster. The *tsukimi* harvest moon viewing tradition is said to have been brought from China in the ninth century, when it spread throughout the country due to its association with agricultural rites. Various explanations exist from country to country as to what is seen when looking at the moon, but in Japan the story has it that a rabbit lives on the moon because the surface markings there look to them like a rabbit making a rice cake. This scene is also said to symbolize a bountiful harvest.



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