



JAPAN INFORMATION
AND CULTURE CENTER
在米国日本大使館広報文化センター

TEACHING TUESDAY

VALENTINE'S DAY

Valentine's Day in Japan takes a much different form than in the United States, mainly because it also has a sister day, White Day. So on Valentine's Day usually only women give chocolate to men, while men are expected to return the favor on White Day.

Valentine's Day was first celebrated in 1936, when Morozoff Ltd. ran an advertisement aimed at foreigners. Later in 1953 it began promoting the giving of heart-shaped chocolates; other Japanese confectionery companies followed suit thereafter. In 1958 the Isetan department store ran a "Valentine sale". Further campaigns during the 1960s popularized the custom. The custom that only women give chocolates to men may have originated from the translation error of a chocolate-company executive during the initial campaigns.

There are two types of chocolate given on Valentine's Day: "giri-choco" 義理チョコ, and "honmei-choco" 本命チョコ. Giri-choco is also called "obligation chocolate" and is given to male co-workers, casual acquaintances, and others with no romantic attachment to the giver. Meanwhile, honmei-choco or "true feelings chocolate" is given to men whom the giver has romantic feelings for. Honmei-choco tends to be higher-quality and more expensive than giri-choco, and in recent years making your own chocolate to truly express your feelings has become popular.