



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

TEACHING TUESDAY

UCHIWA

Japan has two main types of fans, but the uchiwa (団扇; うちわ) is very distinctive. Unlike the internationally well-known folding sensu fans, an uchiwa is a flat, non-folding fan that has been a part of daily life for all social classes since ancient times.

The first mentions of uchiwa began around the 5th century. Back then, uchiwa were often rectangular, and made from big leaves or animal hair. They were also used solely for purification and prayer rituals. However, in the Heian period, nobles began to use these fans to block the sun and hide their faces. By the Kamakura period in the 10th century, the uchiwa had developed its rounded form, and had become mass produced for all people, especially during the hot, summer months.

Uchiwa are often painted with popular and unique designs and motifs. Marugame-uchiwa were one of the first types of uchiwa to be painted like this, and are now considered a traditional craft. Today, uchiwa fans are extremely versatile, as a symbol of summer, a fashion accessory, and even marketing tools.