

It is April in the tea fields of Japan.

There is a little bush who has not seen its first harvest yet. Every day, the gardener comes and tends the bush. The little bush always enjoys this time of day. Today, the gardener comes as usual; however, he starts to put up a scaffold around some of the bushes.

"What is happening?" the little bush asked an older bush standing by.

The older bush replied, "Oh, this . . . It happens every year. Just when it's the best time of the year, the gardener comes to put up a scaffold around us."

"Then what happens?"

"Just wait and see."

After the gardener finished setting up the scaffold, he began to cover it with black tarps.

"I'm scared," said the little bush to the older one. "Why is he covering us? Doesn't the gardener love us?"

"Of course he does," replied the older bush.

When the gardener left, the group of bushes was covered from all sides with several tarps.

"Why is he blocking us from the sun? Doesn't he want us to grow properly?"

"Just wait and see," said the older bush.

The little bush waited. Several days passed. Neither the scaffold nor the tarps were removed.

The little bush became angry. 'I guess the gardener wants to kill us' he thought to himself.

'Why else would he cover us from the sun? He left other bushes uncovered. Why did he cover our bushes?'

Every day, the gardener still came to check on the little bush and tend to him. However, he did not remove the scaffold or tarps.

The little bush became very sad. 'My life is over' he thought. 'No one will want to pick my leaves. They will never be green enough or produce many vitamins.'

Two weeks after the little bush had first been covered, the gardener came with several helpers. They began removing the tarps and picking the top leaves from the bushes that had been covered by tarps. The little bush grew excited. 'Maybe they'll harvest my leaves after all,' he thought.

The little bush watched, noticing that the gardener and his helpers were using their hands to

pick the top leaves from the bushes that had been covered, while the other bushes were being cut from all sides by razors.

"Why are they only picking our top leaves?" the little bush asked the older bush.

"Because they want to pick the best part," answered the older bush.

"But why are they using their hands to pick our leaves instead of using razors like on the other bushes?"

"Oh, they do that so that they won't harm us."

Just as the little bush was pondering these things, he overheard some of the helpers talking.

"Look at this little bush," one of the women said. "He gives us the best tea, the one all the people are waiting for."

The little bush listened in awe and knew he was important.

Gyokuro:

Gyokuro is the king of all green tea. It is known for its sweet, mellow flavor and rich texture. Because it is covered for two weeks before the harvest, a substance in the leaves called 'theanine' (which changes to catechin in other teas) is kept and, as a result, the tea is much sweeter and has a mellow flavor. Unlike other teas, its leaves are carefully hand-picked from the very top of each bush. After they are harvested, a teamster rolls them by hand. As a result, gyokuro is the highest grade and most valued of all green tea.