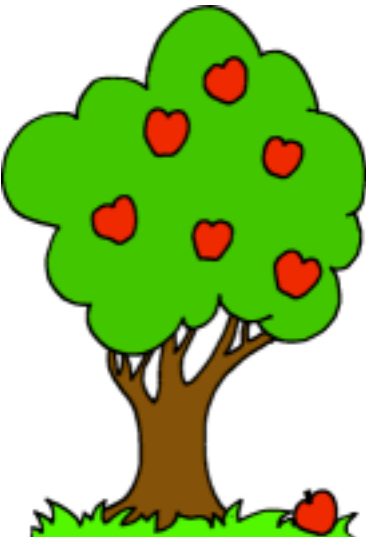


# The Japanese Fruit Grower

*This fairy tale was originally written in Japanese by Yutaka Kachi.*



A long time ago, there was a tree in a field close to a village. This tree bore a lot of delicious fruit. The villagers harvested all the fruit because of its delicious taste. Many people liked the fruit so much that they would cut a branch off the tree and take it home. This was too much for the tree and it died after a short time. In the village there was a clever merchant. He took a cutting from the tree before it died. He fertilised his cutting and produced a new tree, nurturing it and making sure it was strong and healthy. This took many years but he thought it was a worthwhile thing to do. Then the tree bore fruit and he sold the fruit and made a lot of money. But the merchant was a real worrier and so he built a fence around the tree and guarded it day and night. He was not only a worrier, he was also a hard worker and his care of the tree made the fruit even more delicious so more and more people bought it. They made jam from the fruit and sold it. The merchant had the only tree that had fruit good enough to make jam and so all the people who made jam had to buy their fruit from the merchant. This made the merchant less careful and his tree became infested with parasites. When people said to him that there were many worm holes in the tree he would not hear of it and said "the fruit is cheap, stop complaining". When asked if he used any harmful fertilisers he replied that it was a company secret and he would not answer the question. When another merchant asked to buy a branch from the tree he replied he did not want competitors and refused to sell. More and more people bought the fruit, selling to others, making jam and the merchant became the richest man the village had ever seen. The merchant increased the price of the fruit to make as much money as he could even though the price of other food was going down. He could do this because he had the only tree that made fruit suitable for making jam. A young man in the village who loved fruit was poor and could no longer afford the high price. So he found another tree that bore fruit but the fruit was sour and not good for making jam.



The tree was old and had been neglected but the young man looked after it and over the years it became healthy and strong. He invited his friends to help and soon they had more fruit than they needed. They put a sign by their tree which said "Free Fruit". Some people just took the fruit but some also helped to maintain the tree. The young man and his friends didn't mind because they had all the fruit they needed and enjoyed helping the tree grow. More people came to help because they liked what the young man and his friends had done and understood that this tree would not die like the first one and the fruit was getting better and better all the time. Soon there were more people wanting fruit than this tree could sustain so the young man let people take cuttings to grow their own fruit trees as long as they put the "free fruit" sign next to their tree. The villagers paid the young man and his friends for advice on how to grow good trees and the young man and his friends were no longer poor. All the fruit from these trees had the same delicious flavour as the fruit from the young man's tree but there were subtle differences that gave the people more choice and variety for making their jam. The people shared their ideas for improving their trees and preventing parasites from damaging the fruit so the trees grew strong and the fruit got better and better.



The fruit became the most popular in the village and was used to make a rich variety of jams that people bought and sold throughout the village. The villagers started to sell their fruit and jam to far off places and they were happy and content. The young man and his friends were pleased and continued to maintain the original tree because they really enjoyed their work and as they learned more their help and advice was in big demand.

So what of the merchant that did not share his tree? At first he tried to discredit the young man and his friends saying that their fruit was no good. If it was any good they would not be giving it freely to others. But eventually the villagers realised the young mans fruit was very good and stopped buying fruit from the merchant so he had to change or go out of business. At first he found it very difficult to be more open and share his tree and fruit because it was the opposite of what he had been taught when learning his merchant skills. Eventually he did change and he still made enough money to keep his family. In the end there was no difference between the young man and his friends and the merchant.They all made money from providing advice on their trees and their fruit and the people enjoyed the best variety of fruit and jam that they could imagine and so everyone lived happily ever after.



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