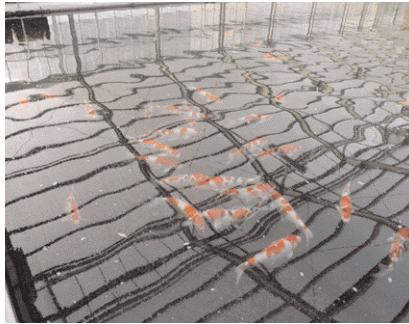


the magic of momotaro



These are the Momotaro bred koi that reside within the above pond. Can you see any that you don't like?

Situated in Okayama near Hiroshima, Momotaro Koi farm (Okayama Nishikigoi Centre) is without doubt one of Japan's finest breeders. Owned and run by President Maeda, they take great pride in producing koi for the Japanese and Asian markets.

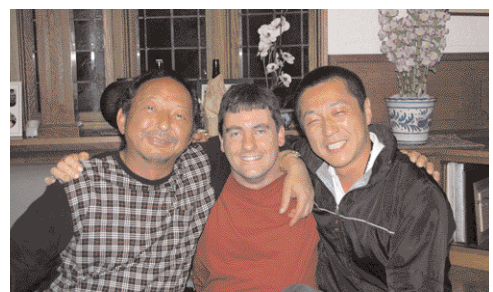
Mr Maeda has one aim, which is to be regarded in Japan and the world as the number one breeder. I think that he is certainly in the top three, but where Momotaro differ from other breeders, is in the fact that they aren't producing cheap koi. Their koi are aimed at the top-level hobbyist.

why I like it

I am drawn to Momotaro Koi Farm for numerous reasons. Mr Maeda is determined to increase the quality and size of all koi produced. They have about 80 parent sets at present, with many more parent candidates that are being grown for future breeding. The smallest parent used to date, is a Kohaku that was bred from last year.

This koi was 75cm long, but just four-years old (Yonsai). This may be a little small to some people, but bear in mind how young this koi is, and also that within the next two years this parent will probably measure about 90cm. It is quite apparent that this is a 'genetically' big koi, and hence, will further Mr Maeda's long term aim of producing big koi. Almost every other parent koi at Momotaro is well in excess of 80cm long, with a few being over one metre!

I personally feel that Momotaro is the only breeder that an inexperienced hobbyist could visit and practically guarantee buying a good koi. They are probably the only farm where you could buy a koi solely for its pattern and it would just happen to be of superb quality to boot! There is just one drawback however – there are no 'cheap' fish for sale here. ▶



From left to right: President Maeda (owner of Momotaro), myself, and Hoshino-san (son of Niigata breeder who is working at Momotaro Koi Farm as an apprentice). This pic was taken at Mr Maeda's house in April 2002 after the Tosai auction of Sakurahime's children (92cm Grand Champion Kohaku of the 2001 ZNA All Japan Show).

Momotaro Koi Farm – All photos provided by Mike Snaden

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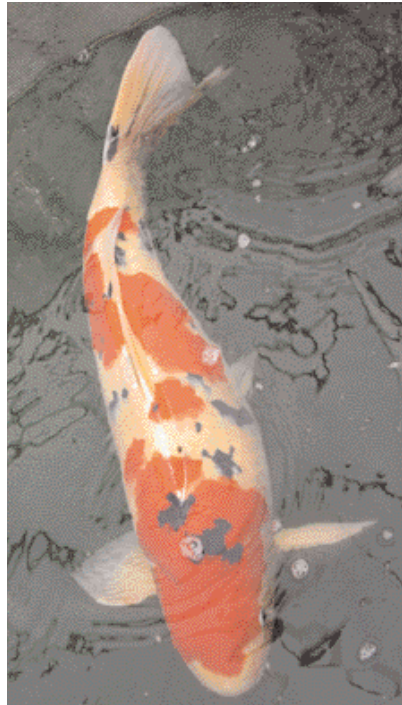
famous for its champions

Momotaro are using many parents that have won Grand Champion in the most prestigious shows in Japan, and can claim fame to the fact that over a span of the last nine years, seven of the All Japan Grand Champions have been raised there. This includes the famous 101cm Sanke that won the All Japan Show 2002. This koi (pictured right) was purchased at 80cm (eight-years old) as a future parent koi, but unfortunately never produced any eggs. Since the koi was bought, in the three years that ensued, the koi grew more each year than it had ever grown in its life.

As you can imagine, parents such as these are incredibly valuable. What impresses me the most however, is that on trips to Japan, you can see many good koi, but the level of which varies greatly from one farm to another. The problem is, that when visiting koi farms, it is quite common to only see just a handful of koi that you would want to buy. At Momotaro Farm, this simply isn't the case! Koi here are consistently big for their respective age, but the quality of each and every koi is just breathtaking!

keeping a good name

I recently asked Mr Maeda never to lower his sights with a view to producing koi for the European market. He told me not to worry, as they had already thought about it, and decided against it. My concerns over this are quite simple. If a breeder were to produce 'world class' koi and reach the ultimate goal as 'number one', and



A potential parent koi

The problem is, that when visiting koi farms, it is quite common to only see just a handful of koi that you would want to buy

From left to right: Mr Chen from Taiwan (almost certainly the best Koi dealer outside Japan), myself, Brian Sousa, Mr Chan (a customer of Mr Chin), Mr Maeda, Daisuke (Mr Maeda's son), Mrs Maeda, and a very merry Hoshino-san (who fell asleep shortly after the photo!)

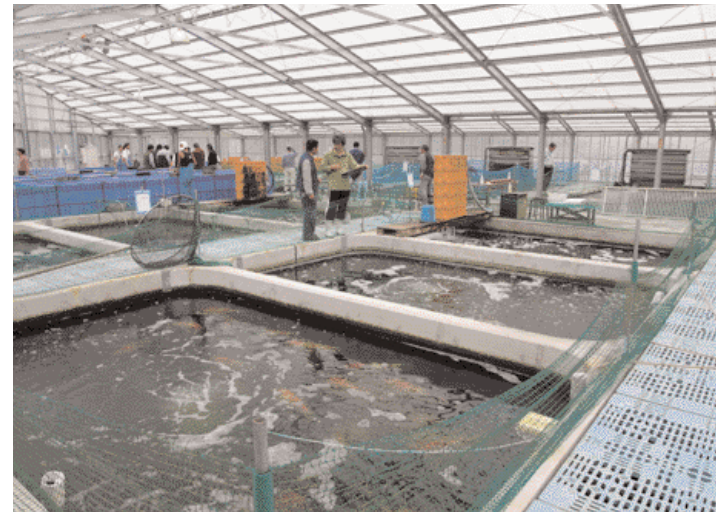


then start producing lower grade koi, these koi would ruin the breeder's reputation. You may ask why? Well, think about it, if a breeder becomes really famous and then starts to sell lower quality koi, many people will buy these koi with great expectations only to find in years to come that they never blossomed as expected. Then, in time people would say, "Oh yes, I bought one of their koi once, but it didn't grow, and turned out bad".

So I hope that you can understand why I think so much of Momotaro Koi Farm? Not many breeders have parents like Momotaro, and some breeders only have one or two good parent sets. Take a trip there one day, even if only for the experience!

personal achievements

Amongst Momotaro's achievements, they have so far produced the biggest Tosai (yearling of 55cm), Nisai (73cm), Sansai (about 84cm), Yonsai, and Gosai koi! The koi



how it all works

This is one of five fish houses (above). The six ponds in the foreground contain some of the parent koi. At the time of taking the picture, the three ponds nearest contain parents that were due to be spawned, with males in the nearest one. The three ponds in the background contain koi that have just been spawned, and the koi are being rested here until going back out into the mud ponds. In the far right corner are two very big ponds containing big koi, with smaller ponds running towards the far left corner. The small ponds presently contain eggs, and newly hatched fry. In the autumn, these small ponds will contain newly harvested nisai koi (two-year-olds).

There is just one drawback however – there are no ‘cheap’ fish for sale here

pictured is a Sanke that was 73cm as Nisai, and now measures about 84cm as Sansai. This koi, surprisingly, is male. The koi has been named 'Monster Taro', and has been sold to an overseas customer who wants it grown past one metre long with the hope of winning the All Japan Show in the not to distant future. Despite being male, I think it has a good chance.

award winning media

Outside of Japan, Momotaro are famed for having the largest concrete filtered koi pond in Japan which contains 1,500 tons of water, some 330,000 imperial gallons! This pond was built when Mr Maeda was a dealer, and wanted the biggest pond he could have. Up until recently, this pond has been home

to a maximum of just 70 koi! These koi range from 70cm, up to over one metre long. The filtration runs beneath decking, around the perimeter of the pond, and uses Momotaro's own filter media called 'Bacteria House'. Last year, this material won an international award as the 'best filter material in the world'. It is also used in the shower filters that you can see in the pictures, as in this configuration, it removes nitrates, and to a degree lowers water hardness.

Prior to installing this filter media, the ponds were filtered with Japanese matting. Because of the change to 'Bacteria House', Momotaro have probably removed enough matting to fill three 24ft shipping containers! The stockpile of redundant media is a sight to behold!



This is the same koi house (above) as above, but the picture is taken from the opposite corner. Here you can clearly see the spawning ropes and the fine white nets, which prevent koi disappearing into the filters that lie underneath the blue decking which runs around each of the ponds. In the background you can see the two larger ponds, which I would estimate to hold around 30,000 gallons each. ►



Man-made mud ponds

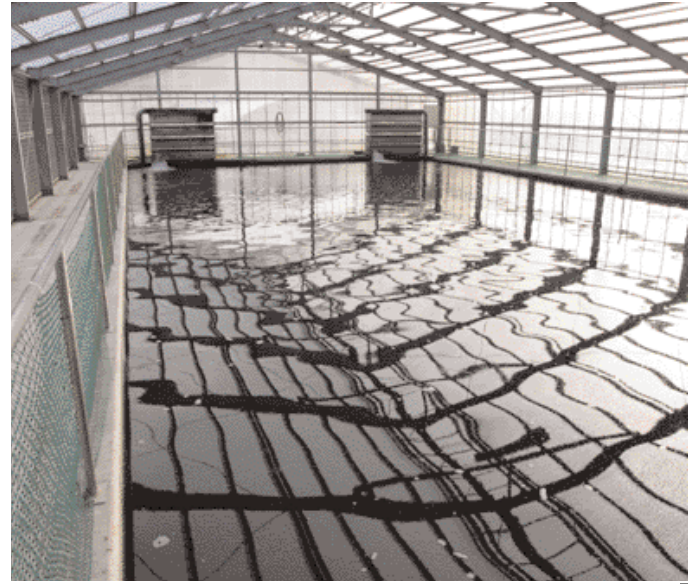
Here are some of Momotaro's man-made mud ponds (above). At the time of taking these pictures, the total mud pond space covered 27,000 metres, but have now been drastically extended to some 60,000 metres. Mr Maeda also has natural mud ponds, but feels that there are many risks involved with keeping koi in conventional mud ponds, like predators, and also thieves. By

can be very carefully looked after during the growing months of summer.

Here is another of Momotaro's koi houses (right). This one has been over-wintering the many Tosai, which are to be put out into the mud ponds. Some of these ponds also contain exclusively male koi. As you can see once again, the filters lie beneath the

wooden decking. At the far right corner are a few more ponds containing eggs and fry.

Yet another big pond! This one contains 500 tons of water (110,000 UK gallons). At the far end you can see the shower filters. This size of pond would be a dream come true in England! The picture below is of the other pond within this fish house. These two ponds contain koi of three



to five-years-old, and serve as summer growing ponds, as well as over-wintering ponds.

This pond (below) is in the same building as the one above, and also contains 500 tons of water. The tags attached to the hand rail have vital information about how many koi are in the pond, what variety, what ages they are, and which parents they were produced from. Also included in these notes is a plan for the weight of food to be given in each feeding, based on the koi's condition on each morning before the first feed. 鯉

Outside of Japan, Momotaro are famed for having the largest concrete filtered koi pond in Japan which contains 1,500 tons of water, some 330,000 imperial gallons

building these man-made mud ponds, such risks are almost completely eliminated, and the koi

