

One of Japan's most enduring national symbols, the cherry flower, is set to travel into space.

The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) is sending seeds to its laboratory at the International Space Station, orbiting above the Earth.

The experiment will observe how the seeds are affected by microgravity.

Schoolchildren will pick about 200 fallen seeds, including from three "ancient trees", this summer for the launch later this year.

The space project will send the seeds from 10 cherry trees, including three designated by the government as natural treasures and praised for producing Japan's most beautiful blossoms.

One of the three ancient trees, "cascade cherry blossoms", draws 300,000 viewers for the three weeks it is in bloom in a small northern town.

Primary school pupils will pick the seeds this summer for lift off in October. The returned seeds will be sent to research institutions after their six-month stay in space.