

Toyota has gone to some extreme lengths to offset the carbon dioxide emissions produced by its Tsutsumi plant in Toyota City, Japan, where it builds the Prius hybrid.

The plant conserves electricity by using solar panels on its roof and reflective solar tubes inside the plant to beam reflected sunlight into rooms. The outside walls are painted with photocatalytic paint to absorb harmful airborne gases, like nitrous oxides and sulfur oxides. Toyota has planted 50,000 trees to offset carbon dioxide emissions, and even the grass has been engineered to grow more slowly than conventional grass, so the lawn needs to be mowed only once a year.

But none of those measures can compare with Toyota's latest creation: two new flower species that were specially developed to absorb heat and harmful gases.

The flowers are derived from cherry sage and gardenia. The gardenia's leaves generate water vapor, thereby reducing the surface temperature at the factory and the energy needed for cooling.

While many automakers have environmentally friendly initiatives, Toyota has been especially proactive. Some people have said that the Prius loses most of its environmental cred when the hybrid's manufacturing process is taken into account. Toyota acknowledges that Prius production is more carbon dioxide heavy than that of gas-engine cars. But the company says its changes at the Prius plant are not related to that criticism.

Last summer, as we reported, the company installed plastic solar-cell "flowers" in various cities around the United States, including Manhattan, that served as power-charging stations for portable computers and cellphones.

By [Stephen Williams](#)