

College Guild
PO Box 6448 Brunswick, Maine 04011

Gardening

Unit 7 of 7

*"The autumn breeze rises
on the shore at Fukiage
and those white chrysanthemums
are they flowers? Or not?
or only breakers on the beach?"*



Japanese poet, Sugawara Michizane (845-903 AD)

1. Why is this poet doubtful about what he can see?
2. When you stand on a seashore gazing at the ocean, what other images might you visualize?
3. Write a short poem that describes how you feel when visualizing the ocean.

In this final Unit we are going to look at Japanese Gardens and learn how they differ totally from the idea of a Western garden.



Japanese gardens are designed to reflect the beauty of nature. Every detail has a significant meaning and has been planned and put there for a reason. Harmony and tranquility are found in every true Japanese garden. This is especially important considering how most Japanese live in such cramped and overpopulated areas. A tiny courtyard garden can be just as impressive as a garden on a much grander scale, as every aspect is considered.

4. When you view the Japanese garden on the previous page, or the two below, describe them with at least three descriptive words.
5. How are these gardens different from a typical Western garden?
6. Why do you think the Japanese are so meticulous about their gardens?



The ancient origins of Japanese gardens date back to the influence of Shinto and Buddhist philosophies. A garden was to be a place of quiet reflection and meditation. The shape of every tree, plant, or rock was of greatest significance. The first gardens were developed on the grounds of Shinto shrines and Buddhist monasteries.

7. What do you think would be the most important element of a Japanese garden? Why?
8. Is it possible to have a garden with no plants in it? What would be the purpose of this?

Stones

Stones are the foundation and the soul of a Japanese garden. In ancient times, stones were believed to be gods; even today, they command pride of place in the garden. The perfect stone can cost huge sums of money. Stones are used to represent mountains where there are none and to construct bridges, garden paths, and walkways. They are always placed in odd numbers as most people agree that odd numbers are more visually beautiful than even numbers (You can notice this in many paintings, too!). The garden of the Ryoanji Temple in Kyoto, Japan has no plants, flowers, trees, or weeds. It is simply a large rectangle of white pebbles and fifteen rocks.



Rock Garden at the Ryoanji Temple, Kyoto, Japan

9. Describe at least three (3) emotions you likely would feel walking through such a garden?

Sand and Gravel

The next element in a Japanese garden is sand and gravel. This represents the Zen doctrine of the fragility of life and reverence for the permanence of the past. Shinto followers used to scatter white sand in sacred groves to attract spirits of nature. This sand or gravel is usually made of white or grey granite and is used to represent water in some form -- from a raging rapid to a trickle of a stream.

10. How would you use sand to create "a river where no water runs?"

11. What are some of the benefits for using sand and gravel in shrines and temples where there are many visitors?



Zen Buddhists incorporate raking gravel and sand as part of their meditation rituals. With total concentration, flashes of enlightenment can be achieved.



Many intricate patterns are created with this style of raking.

12. How would raking sand and gravel create flashes of enlightenment?

13. Describe a time that intense concentration provided flashes of enlightenment for you.

14. How could you rake such intricate patterns without leaving any footprints?

15. How would you remove unwanted leaves or trash from the middle of a Zen garden after it had been raked?

Water

Water will always be found in the garden of a Shinto shrine as it is used for purification. Usually in a stone basin with a wooden ladle, visitors are expected to wash their hands before entering. Buddhism has influenced the creation of lakes and ponds where there were none. The water absorbs the colors of the sky and changes the mood of the garden, depending on the time of day or season.



16. Which appeals to you more -- a Zen garden or one with real water? Why?

Before we continue with the elements of Japanese garden it is brainteaser time!

17. How many words can you make from the word "Japanese?" Hint -- there are at least fifteen.

Flora - Plant Life

All plants in a Japanese garden are grown as elements of design rather than for picking or eating. Throughout the seasons, the Japanese garden surprises with ever changing colors and textures. From cherry blossom time, where the delicate pink blooms are so fleeting, to the wonders of red maple leaves gently falling to the ground in fall, there is always something to engage your senses.



Hanami in Japan is cherry blossom viewing time. This is an excuse for the entire country to party under the blossoms of the *sakura* and marvel at such ephemeral beauty.

18. What tree or plant could we celebrate here in the United States with such enthusiasm as the Japanese? Describe why you are choosing this type of tree.

Trees are believed to possess divine spirits and are often manipulated to give the impression of age. Branches are tied and bound and forced into painful looking shapes. The term "Niwaki" is used for this process and the trees that are manipulated into different shapes are often known as "bonsai" trees. The reason Japanese do this is to distill in miniature the essence of nature. Below is a typical design:



19. Do you believe that nature should be controlled in this way? Why or why not?

20. Describe at least three (3) other ways that we as humans try to control nature?

Space

Space is also an element in Japanese gardens. It is a deliberate area not to be filled, in order to create illusions and to control nature.



Space in a garden provides solitude and contemplation and unites the foreground and the background. When strolling through a Japanese garden, many of the views are staged for optimum effect. In order to see the gardens from specific angles, often a framing technique is used. This reduces the scale of the panorama and focuses on the details the gardener wants the viewer to see.



21. Draw any view seen through an opening -- a window, a door, a keyhole -- use your imagination.

22. Write a story about an imaginary stroll through a Japanese garden. What do you see? What do you feel? What most appeals to you? What is least appealing?

23. If you were Japanese, what feelings and emotions might you experience if you found yourself in a typical Western-style garden?

The Japanese Tea House



Tea houses were originally built by Buddhist monks. They were placed in tranquil settings, surrounded by small gardens. To reach the tea house, guests would follow a winding path, usually made of stone, that passed by ponds and streams. Even today, they are constructed of wood and bamboo, with sliding doors and windows made of *shoji*, a translucent Japanese paper.

24. Why do you think paper is used in these buildings rather than wood or glass?

Before entering a tea house, guests must purify themselves by washing their hands and rinsing their mouths with water from a small stone basin. On entering the tea house all shoes must be removed. The guests sit on *tatami*, mats made of woven straw, and sit through a ritual that can last up to four hours. A powdered green tea is eventually mixed and served to the guests.



25. What do you think is the purpose of such a ceremony?

26. Do you think such a ritual would have a place in Western society? Why or why not?

Well, we have come to the end! We hope you have enjoyed this short journey through the world of gardens and gardening. As you can see, a garden means many things to many people. We will leave you with this Zen thought:

*"The mind needs only the barest hints
before it can be catapulted on a fascinating journey."*

Since this is your final Unit, we'd appreciate any feedback or suggestions you have for improving the Course!

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes