

A **Japanese garden** should look *older* and more established than its surroundings. Plants, Shrubs and Trees can help bring your garden space to life and make it appear at one with nature.



Their use can be incredibly simple but really effective. For example, use one or two blooming plants as the main focus point of your garden and then add green shrubs and bushes to blend them in with your gardens view and aspect. You could plant an Acer and surround it with low level shrubs to get this effect.

Avoid over cluttering your garden and you may find that you have to slightly control your enthusiasm. Always pick living ingredients that suit the climate where you live and don't be afraid to plant trees like Maples in colder climates as they survive in Japan in temperatures well below minus 10 degrees.

The heat of the sun is more of an enemy than the cold and ice.

One of the biggest queries I get is what sort of plants or shrubs are suitable for a Japanese garden. If you are reading this in Asia or in North America there are many types of plants and shrubs that you can use. Obviously, wherever you are in the world you have to pick relevant plants that will grow and flourish in your local climate.

The Japanese do not use overly exotic looking plants in their gardens. Evergreens are the staple plants and tree growth. Trees, plants and shrubs are picked to show the garden's passage of time and seasons, this means deciduous plants that bloom into colour in seasons are a favourite ingredient. Japanese gardens concentrate on the entire look of the garden and use common plants to represent the natural world.

A smaller space Japanese garden will benefit from repeating just a few varieties, this will give your garden a sense of 'continuity'. Green is going to be a very

dominant colour in any Japanese garden and you should see 'green' for most times of the year in all the seasons.

Berries and flowers signify in their colour the changing of seasons in a Japanese garden and should be used sparingly. Contrast between green and a little colour is highly visually effective and an important consideration in Japanese garden design.

Evergreen Shrubs – are one of the principle elements for you to make use of along with seasonal shrubs like HOSTA that sits nicely in a rocky area of the garden. Ferns are another great option, they are hardy and tend to give areas of the garden a fuller look in certain seasons.

This section is going to give you some suggestions on what to consider adding to your Japanese style garden and I promise not to get too technical as this is a book on how to *simply* build a Japanese garden. As you become more adept at this form of gardening and you acquire more knowledge you can start to spread your wings a little.

Plants and Shrubs:

A popular common element in a Japanese garden and Zen gardens are small Coniferous shrubs. Evergreens provide colour all year round and will help your other trees and plants stand out during their seasonal changes.

A good rule of thumb is for every Deciduous planting plant 2 evergreens. Coniferous shrubs really fit the bill as they are hardy and require little maintenance apart from some minor shaping and pruning. They really look striking when planted near rocks and stones and because they start off small and the view actually gets better over time. Remember to plant with spaces between them and other shrubs or rocks to allow this growth.

You have literally hundreds of varieties and species of Coniferous shrubs to choose from and popular ones include Mugo Pine, Dwarf Balsam firs and Next Spruce.



Mugo Pine as part of a Japanese style garden - striking low level shrubs

Bamboo is another popular addition in a Japanese garden not only for separating areas but also in plant form. Tea gardens always have arrangements of Bamboo but for your small space garden then these are the varieties of Bamboo plants that will work best *sasa*, *dake*, *chiku* and *take*. Bamboo signifies vitality and life to the Japanese.

Japanese garden plants are chosen for their flowering and if you want a cavalcade of colour to contrast with your evergreens and trees then Herbaceous Japanese plants will be the solution.

Morning glory , Iris, deadnettle, Lily Turf, Kuzu Vine, White Radish, Japanese Pampas grass, Henbit, Horse Radish, Japanese Ardisia, Peony, White Chrysanthemum are plants that flower very colourfully but also in most cases have very green leaves providing a beautiful contrast.



White chrysanthemum



The Kuzu vine flower

You can use Azaleas and Camellias to great effect as well. For the spectacular there is the climbing Japanese Wisteria which grows vertically and is covered in white flowers to a maximum height of approximately 5 feet.



Japanese Wisteria - white flowers and they famously come in a lilac colour too!

A small pine tree is considered a suitable in a Zen garden area. Bonsai trees of *momo* (peach), apple and lemon emanate fragrances that will help you destress and relax. Cherry blossom flowers(also known as *Sakura*), apricot, white egret orchid, Japanese wood poppy in yellow , Himalayan blue poppy and the fragile pink maiden lily are flowers that add lots of interesting colour to a Japanese style garden too.

Bonsai plants/trees are popular too but be warned they take quite a lot of looking after and need to be skilfully watered and pruned. These are usually placed in suitably sized pots or containers around the garden area. Some like the Japanese Maple bonsai look wonderful planted between two rocks whilst others like Japanese Black Pine or Japanese White Pine, Plum and Cherry flourish better in a container.



Japanese Cherry bonsai

By far the most popular bonsai plant in a Japanese garden is the Japanese Black Pine which is hardy and looks green all year round. A balance of colour is what you are looking to achieve throughout the 12 months of the year.



A Japanese Black Pine bonsai

A Japanese garden should appear 'older' than its surroundings and give the impression of timelessness.

Moss is something you can use to give that 'ageing' impression. Natural yoghurt provides a base for moss growth but many serious Japanese gardeners will transplant moss from a wooded area onto stones and rocks ensuring that it is kept moist until it 'takes'. Humid climates are best for growing mosses.

Herbaceous plants to consider include Peony (they have beautiful flowers), Daisy, Aster, Lily turf, White Radish, White Chrysanthemum, Water Parsley, Iris, Spider Lily and Kuzu vine to name but a few.

They all have beautiful brilliantly coloured flowers and most have green leaves giving you a great contrast within your garden area alongside stones and rocks. *Sumi* or balance is achieved, an aim you should have with your own Japanese garden.

Hosta as I mentioned is another plant to give some thought too. There are over 60 recognised species of hosta and they are an ingredient in Japanese gardens. The climate in the Japanese islands is perfect for them to flourish. Hostas enjoy humid and warm climates and are shade tolerant, hardy and easy to grow and the variety of leaf patterns are second to none. You can plant them in containers too but when planted in a garden they can sit together in groups or in splendid isolation.

They do not like chalky soil or soil that drains easily and they will die in waterlogged areas very easily. They can be pretty small or types that are very large, for example the Empress Wu variety can grow up to 6 feet wide with leaves that can measure up to 2 feet in length!

With Hostas there is no right or wrong way, you just need to pick the combinations that you like or catch your eye. Hostas look really good when planted within a gravel area - making them a perfect addition for a Japanese style garden.

They will need some slug protection (I use pellets that are blue in colour and spread them generously a couple of times during the spring, summer and autumn about 3 inches away from the plant but in a circle all the way round) and it is best to stick to good all-rounder species, here are a few we recommend:

Praying hands - they stand upright with fairly narrow and wavy leaves.



Praying Hands Hosta

El Nino - colourful blue leaves with with narrow white streaked margins



El Nino Hosta

Risky Business - which have dark green leaves with some white in the centre. This type can grow up to 4 feet wide so is a great suggestion for a larger Japanese garden.



Risky Business Hosta

Revolution - has yellow and speckled green leaves.



Revolution Hosta

There are many ways to include Hosta within your Japanese garden. They are fairly low maintenance and can sit perfectly in soil, containers, near rocks and within a gravel area.



Hosta and low level plantings look very attractive together

Trees:

If you desire Bonsai trees in your garden then refer to the bonsai section in **'The Japanese Garden Club'** for the information that you need.



Maples rank amongst the most popular trees in Japanese gardens. they are native to Japan and provide spectacular colours in the fall or autumn. As the weather cools in late September and into October this is when maples are at their best - an explosion of colour.

Maples are slow growing and fairly compact which means they fit in perfectly into smaller space - perfect for a small domestic Japanese garden space. If you have a very hot climate where you live you may need to plan where you plant them a little more carefully - putting them in the shade of other larger trees or semi-protected by a wall or fence. Some maples are pretty resistant to direct sunlight but most do not enjoy it.

Maples like (Acer Palmatum) have been in Japanese garden for hundreds of years as specimen or companion plants. A lot of varieties of maples do not grow very tall and dwarf types rarely exceed five to six feet tall. However, the tallest Japanese maples can grow up to 35 feet in height!



Generally when deciding on what Maple to buy for your garden you need to consider the 2 types.

Firstly, there are *dissectums* - you may know these as lace leaf maples and they are called this because their leaves are fine and lacy in appearance. These trees

cascade their foliage and look absolutely great near a water feature, pathway or rock formations. Species to think about using are: Red Dragon, Crimson Queen, Waterfall, Garnet and Emerald lace.

The second group of maples are called - *Upright*. They grow up to 20 feet in height and widen with age. they are popular in a larger Japanese garden space and you will see in such gardens varieties such as Bloodgood, Emperor 1, Autumn glory and Katsura.



Katsura upright maple - turning colour in autumn

Dwarf maples need to be protected a little, they do not like full direct sunlight but if you have no option then you should go with a green leaved variety that do have a little more tolerance. Direct sun will burn the leaves of a maple and if you can plant them near some shade then that will be far more preferable.



Dwarf Maple

To get the full effect of a maple they must have some sun otherwise they will not have the pigmentation change that they need to display all those lovely fall reds, oranges and yellows that we all love.



A perfect dwarf maple for a small space Japanese garden is the Amur maple or *Acer Ginnala*. This turns red in autumn and produces a red fruit. It is a great tree for full sun or partial shade with well drained moist soil.



Maples also make great additions to a garden area in pots - as long as you pick a dwarf variety! Good types are : Butterfly, Hoshi Kuzu, Waterfall, Pixie and Red Dragon. A Bloodgood acer will start off fine in an average sized pot but will grow fairly quickly and need to be transplanted to a much larger container to keep it healthy and alive.



Pots are a very practical way of displaying Japanese Maples

Autumn of Fall colours are what attracts people too them. The Japanese love their gardens to reflect natures relationship with the seasons so it is easy to understand why Maples / Acers fit the bill.

Some of the most popular Maples for their fall colour are: Autumn of Fall colours are what attracts people too them. The Japanese love their gardens to reflect natures relationship with the seasons so it is easy to understand why Maples / Acers fit the bill.

Some of the most popular Maples for their fall colour are: Acer Japonicum "Aconitifolium" or the Fern Leaf Maples as they are known in english. If you are lucky you will see rainbow leafs consisting of orange, red, yellow and purple all on one leaf. Acer Japonicum "Aconitifolium" or the Fern Leaf Maples as they are known in english. If you are lucky you will see rainbow leafs consisting of orange, red, yellow and purple all on one leaf.

Fireglow is another. It's an upright Maple and rises to a maximum height of around 12 feet or so. It's foliage is bright red and is similar to a Bloodgood maple. It's foliage is bright red and is similar to a Bloodgood maple.

Orangeola has cascading fountain limbs and has low growing lace-leaves, wathc out for its orange-red colour in September



Orangeola Maple

Osakazuki is a show off! Just stunning very intense red foliage for you to admire on large leaves.



Osakazuki Maple

For a Maple with later colouring, in November the Hogyoku turns a sort of bright sunset/ pumpkin coloured orange.

How to Care For Maples/Acers:

Smaller maples have unsurprisingly smaller root systems and like larger maples need to have these systems protected from the extremes of weather that nature can throw at us. Mulching of up to a couple of inches in depth will protect your trees from ice, frost and extreme heat. You SHOULD NOT put the mulch around the trees trunk however as this encourages rotting and insects (try and put the mulch to within 5 inches or 15 centimetres of the trunk).

Your soil for all Maples/Acers should be slightly acidic and rich in constituents, also make sure your soil drains well as one things maples do not grow in is very wet waterlogged ground. Having spoken to a couple of my tree expert contacts they tell me Japanese maples should be fertilised in the spring and it is preferable to use one that has low levels of nitrogen.

Rainfall over a longer period of time should be enough to keep the maples in your Japanese garden healthy but if you live in a very dry climate then a weekly water is the order of the day. Deep watering on a weekly basis encourages deeper roots.

Trees should be watered at the roots and avoid sprinkling water on leaves as they can scorch in direct sunlight. In winter do not allow your maple to dry out, a monthly water should be enough. Be aware that in the first two weeks on the tree being in your garden they will need generous amounts of water at least twice a week until their root system establishes itself.

In short, plant maples where they get some sun and some shade. A good spot is morning sunshine and afternoon shade although if you do it the other way round it will still be fine for health and growth as long as you look after them. you will notice that sunlight makes the red leafed maples go even redder which is a lovely effect within a garden.

Smaller trees may need some winter protection in the form of a wind break or extra light but as they are deciduous they will go dormant throughout the winter after their display in the autumn.

Maples can be expensive, they grow slowly and are very pretty. They are quite easy to grow and care for contrary to popular belief. Nitrogen is one of the maples biggest enemies - they grow slowly so they cannot grow fast enough to absorb it. A fertiliser containing even less than 20% nitrogen once wet will be absorbed into a maple or acer extremely quickly and most probably kill it. Good rich organic soil is what you need istopsoil! Simple as that.

Maples grow well with azaleas, ferns , rhododendrons and dwarf conifers. There are many varieties of the latter and dwarf conifers are often grown in containers. Some Japanese gardeners like to change them around depending on the occasion - adding some to the garden and removing others with their containers. Here are some popular dwarf conifers and their English names:

Abies lasiocarpa 'Dufflon'

Cedrus deodara 'Pygmaea'

Chamaecyparis obtusa 'Butter Ball'

Chamaecyparis obtusa 'Gemstone'

Chamaecyparis obtusa 'Golden Sprite'

Chamaecyparis pisifera 'Tsukumo'

Chamaecyparis pisifera 'White Pygmy'

Cryptomeria japonica 'Birodo'

Cryptomeria japonica 'Tansu'

Cryptomeria japonica 'Tensan'

Picea abies 'Thumbelina'

Picea glauca 'Elf' Picea glauca

Jean's Dilly' Picea glauca

Jean's Dilly' Picea orientalis '

Tom Thumb' Picea orientalis '

Tom Thumb' Pinus mugo '

Donna's Mini' Pinus mugo '

'Sherwood Compact' Pinus mugo

Tsuga canadensis 'Betty Rose'

Tsuga canadensis 'Cloud Prune'

Tsuga canadensis 'Minuta'

Once you have healthy and continuous growth over a year or two and they are established this is where you move on to pruning and shaping your maples/Acers and pines. **'The Japanese Garden Club'** has a pruning and shaping section.

