



Japanese Garden Fact Sheet

Overview

Occupying nine acres on the slopes of a canyon, this is one of America's oldest, most elaborate, and gracefully matured Japanese gardens. A five-room house, pagodas and lanterns, and many mature plants were moved to the site from a commercial tea garden in Pasadena in 1912. A walled courtyard containing a rock and sand garden and a bonsai exhibition area was added in 1968. The garden boasts several beautiful forms of Japanese red pine, handsome spreading junipers, large cycads, arbors of wisteria, and thirty-foot-high sweet olives.

History

When Mr. Huntington asked William Hertrich, his garden superintendent, to look for plants to develop a Japanese garden, Hertrich approached George Marsh, an art collector and importer of Asian art objects. Mr. Marsh had opened a tea garden in Pasadena around 1904, which was not commercially successful. He offered to sell the contents of his establishment: plants, garden ornaments, and Japanese house. In 1912, seventy men worked daily for five months to move the lot to the Huntington and establish the garden within a canyon chosen for that purpose. Later, a Japanese craftsman built the moon bridge and gong tower. In 1968, the Zen and Bonsai courts were opened to the public. By the late 1950s, the house had fallen into disrepair. A local cultural group, the San Marino League, took up the Japanese Garden as a long-term project, revitalized the garden, and continues to provide critical support for the garden and its programs.

Landscape

The Japanese traditionally revere nature and their gardens are a quiet retreat from the pressure of life rather than a showplace. They are designed to be revealed gradually from a multitude of viewpoints as one strolls through them. The three main elements of a Japanese garden are water, rocks, and plants. All gardens have each of these, or the symbol or illusion of each such as a water basin instead of a pond or a dry gravel streambed.

- The central garden is modeled after a private stroll garden.
- The house is an upper middle class home from the 1800s built in the Shoin style. With unpainted surfaces and natural materials, its design is to help one appreciate the beauty of nature.
- Bonsai are potted trees that are intentionally dwarfed by pruning and cultural practices. They are meant to look like miniature versions of old, weathered trees found in nature.
- Suiseki are also known as viewing stones. They are beautiful stones whose shape naturally suggests a distant mountain, animal, or human figure. They are not carved or changed by people.

- The Karsansui, also known as a rock and sand garden or dry landscape, is a symbolic garden where the viewer quietly uses his or her imagination to interpret the scene. This style of garden is usually viewed from the veranda of a Buddhist temple compound, in which case it is known as a Zen Garden.

Collections

- *Prunus* species – JAPANESE FLOWERING PLUM (apricot), TAIWAN FLOWERING CHERRY, FLOWERING PEACH and NECTARINE, JAPANESE FLOWERING CHERRY, and NANKING CHERRY, all bloom between January and April. The cherry represents the beauty and charm of the Japanese countryside. The flowering peach represents domesticity and congeniality.
- BAMBOO – clumping, running, dwarf, medium, large timber, and variegated forms. Bamboo represents straightforwardness, strength through yielding, sincerity, and family loyalty.
- Pines – JAPANESE BLACK PINE (the mainstay of garden), JAPANESE RED PINES (common, weeping, umbrella, and Dragon's eye) as well as non-Asian pines such as ALEPPO, STONE, CANARY ISLAND, and TORREY. Pines represent long life and endurance.

Programs

Two docent groups and the Education Department conduct programs in the Japanese Garden. San Marino League

- Docents lead tours of the Japanese Garden for school groups.
- An Ikebana group studies the Japanese style of flower arranging and provides fresh flower arrangements for the house.

Sakura Docents

- On Girl's Day, March 3, the Sakura docents set up a display of dolls in the Japanese house.
- Children's Day is a Japanese national holiday which takes place annually on May 5. It was formerly known as Boy's Day. To celebrate children and their spirit, the Sakura docents hang streamers from bamboo poles, usually colored in red and black.
- During the Tanabata, or Star Festival, on July 7, *origami*, tassels, and messages are created and attached to branches of bamboo to commemorate a legendary love story.

Education Department

- As staffing permits, a Plant Discovery Cart designed to facilitate exploration of the Japanese Garden is stationed near the house. It has activities for families with an emphasis on the young children who love this area.