

石
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Green Concepts Group, LLC



Japanese-Style Landscape Design
Niwaki (Sculpted) Landscape Pruning
Architecture / Interior Architecture
Bonsai / Niwaki Lectures-Demos



Members: APLD (Association of Professional Landscape Designers) + AHS (American Horticultural Society) + SARA (Society of American Registered Architects)

Shizen (She-zane)

Shizen, means “nature” or “natural”. The principles of **Shizen**, consider nature the original designer and thus all natural things are appealing to humans both consciously and subconsciously. Humans have an emotional tie to nature, and the more closely it is replicated in the garden, the more attractive it becomes. Japanese people began replicating nature in miniature as gardens throughout their earliest history, and nature indeed saturates all aspects of Japanese culture.

Wa (Wah)

Wa, is the Japanese word for harmony. This concept of harmony was so very important to the Japanese people and their culture, that it was one of the seventeen articles that are described as Japan’s first constitution. This document dating back to 604 A.D. stated that all behavior was to be conducted in a harmonious manner. This covered not only social behavior, but political and business behavior as well.

This behavior became so ingrained in the culture and arts, and soon all things Japanese took on this element that became so important to their lives. In Japanese gardens, is of paramount importance, and is evident in the garden from conception thru construction and continues thru the years of enjoyment in the experience of the visitor. **Wa** is basically “harmony with nature” in the Japanese garden.

Ishi (Ee-she)

Ishi, means stone, and the love of stone is apparent everywhere in the garden. The subject of stone can’t be covered without a little knowledge of Japan’s indigenous, Shinto religion. Shinto is an animistic religion, one which attributes a spirit to the natural surroundings. Stones, trees, mountains etc. were believed to have their own spirits. From this ancient religion, the Japanese to this day have a great appreciation of all that is part of the living world.

Stones brought into the garden have a great deal of usefulness. *Tobo Ishi* stepping stones are really buried boulders with one flat surface. *Nobedan* paths are constructed of small stones laid out in a painstaking manner. A *Karesansui* is the dry raked garden which uses small pebbles and large boulders to recreate the look of mountains or islands in the ocean. Beautiful carved stone comes into the garden in the form of bridges, stone lanterns and water lavers. The garden contractor will never leave the choice of stone to the happenstance of a “load of rocks” delivered to the site. The important stones that dress the garden, are a part of the scene he is “painting” and thus he will hand pick boulders, and decide which is the best face forward, and how deep to plant them. Stones in groups have a harmonious relationship to each other stone, and this will also dictate their placement (remember **Wa**?).

Take (Tah-kay)

Take, is simply bamboo. Not only is it a living entity in the Japanese garden, it is a valuable resource for many things that are constructed in the garden. Water spouts and fences are the primary use of this material, but screens, tools and tea ceremony objects are also made from **Take**. This wonderful, renewable material remains a favorite for garden designers in Japan. The Japanese were truly “green” before green was cool.

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Fukinsei (Foo-keen-say-ee)

Fukinsei, means “without balance”, or “without symmetry”. The Japanese people learned that building and designing things asymmetrically gave things a fresh and provocative look. Symmetry requires the viewer to mentally confirm the exactness of the situation. Asymmetry allows the eyes, mind, and soul a chance to rest and absorb. When you want a natural look to your garden, you strive for asymmetry.

Miekakure (Me-eh-kah-koo-ray)

Boye’ Lafayette De Mente, in his book “Elements of Japanese Design” states:

“**Miekakure** is made up of two words, *mie*, which means to show off, to display for appearance’s sake, as in vanity, and *kakure*, which means to hide. The use of **Miekakure** in Japanese aesthetics refers to the effect, to the power, of getting only tantalizing glimpses of something, such as the moon alternately being obscured by clouds, or seeing a woman’s leg in the slit of an ankle-length gown.”

In the Japanese garden, **Miekakure** is a very important feature, and highly sought after in the design itself. The idea that the garden changes from different viewpoints is a quality that distinguishes Japanese gardens from other types of gardens and gives them great depth. The garden designer will make sure that things are either pointed out to you as you move through the garden space, or obscured from your view. He will construct pathways in a purposeful way, to not only move you through the space, but reveal elements at his will. The place where **Miekakure** becomes of paramount importance is the *Roji*, or Tea Garden, where the controlling of sight, sound, smell and blood pressure are most desire.

Hoki and Chiri-tori (Ho-kee and Cheer-ee-tor-ee)

These are the names of two maintenance tools, the bamboo broom and dust pan. The importance of tools to the design phase of a Japanese garden is in that the designer needs to evaluate the maintenance ability or willingness of the client to be his or her own gardener. As a Japanese garden designer, it is usually necessary to set up a schedule of regular visits to bring the plant elements back into trim. Homeowners can learn pruning skills, but we will often have to go back in to repair bamboo fences, re-level lanterns, and replace some dead plant material. Japanese gardens are meant to be kept clean and neat. In Japan, public gardens are addressed each morning by all the staff, (garden and office) for a cleanup. In private homes, this is often the job of the grandparents living in the residence. No one minds this work, after all it brings one into nature, and creates the much sought after **Wa**.

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Thoughts on Japanese Garden Trees, Pruning and Maintenance

Japanese Gardens evoke landscapes inspired by streams, waterfalls, mountains, rocks, trees and plants. These various elements come together as a whole to create a Japanese Garden. The elements of a well designed Japanese Garden help to root it both physically and culturally in its surroundings.

One of the most overlooked and elusive elements of Japanese Garden Maintenance, is its trees, shrubs and plants and the Niwaki – sculpted, fine aesthetically pruned specimen trees. These universal elements are the heart of a Japanese Garden - as they are the living elements of these gardens and require skilled, professional care and attention.

A Japanese Garden is not just about designing the garden, but knowing what that garden is going to look like and its needs in 5, 10, 15, 20 years and how those elements, trees, shrubs and plants will evolve in those years. The Japanese Garden Design & Pruning Techniques experience and knowledge of the skilled & trained Japanese Garden Designer and Japanese Gardener that will afford the Japanese Garden to look the way it was designed, as it evolves through time.

A Japanese Garden is not something you put in and walk away from – Maintenance is a crucial part of Japanese Gardens. It is a commitment of consistent maintenance from simple weeding and cleaning up to fine aesthetic pruning. This commitment requires good Japanese pruning and gardening tools and the time and costs of Japanese Garden professionals, if you don't want to handle the tasks yourself. There are no power tools to accomplish these tasks – they are done with hand tools, other than an occasional need to bring in a chain saw for large tree branch pruning/tree removal. Power always doesn't mean better results. Japanese Garden Pruning Techniques require practice, practice and more practice. Everything will not be by the book – each tree will have its own needs – but the Japanese Pruning, Gardening and Maintenance Techniques must be learned, understood and practiced, before they can be varied from.

The Japanese Gardener with fine aesthetic pruning abilities must learn and have a thorough understanding of the anatomy of trees, branches and shrubs; their achievement is to have a trained and skilled eye from the years of learning and practicing Japanese Garden Pruning Techniques – about 9-11 years to really be proficient.

Maintenance of Japanese Gardens is more complicated than regular gardens; there are many influencing items, including having knowledge, understanding and practicing different Japanese Art forms - in the Japanese Culture, all of the Arts are inter-related with common elements/influences on each other. Through years of practice/experience, the skills are learned to be a Japanese Gardener; it's this commitment to learning/practicing various Japanese Arts that hones their skills.

The proper use of trees and planting materials is imperative to the success of a Japanese Garden – both in aesthetics and sustainability of the garden. Japanese Garden Pruners have a much better understanding of what planting materials should be designed into a Japanese Garden – as they know detailed specifics of the growth, affects of watering, needs, workability, longevity, aesthetic value, etc. of the planting materials because they interact with them on a constant basis. Knowing which trees/planting materials are maintenance headaches are key, as this is crucial to the maintenance budgets for the Japanese Gardens and also key to the number/types of staff required to maintain a Japanese Garden. When applied to the residential Japanese Gardens, the practical, hands-on experience/knowledge is a key to presenting a proper, well thought-out design for their Japanese Garden, depending on their level of maintenance wanted on the project. This knowledge and experience is far more preferred than that of a designer with no hands-on experience on Japanese Garden Maintenance.

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Japanese Garden Pruning Tools

Precision Japanese Garden Pruning requires the use of the following hand tools noted below. The better quality tools have the craftsmanship needed to assist the Japanese Garden Pruner in successfully completing their tasks allowing full use of their trained, artistic eye.

The use of the tools are not the difficult part of Japanese Garden Pruning – the skill of know how, when and where to use them is difficult to acquire.

- Hand Snips (Ki-basami) - Japanese hand snips are used for detailed pruning of trees & shrubs; this is a Japanese pruners main tool.
- Felcos (Sentei-basami) - Hand pruner for pruning branches about the size of your thumb - these are not an accurate/detail pruning tool.
- Japanese Standard Pruning Saw (Sentei-noko) - This fine-toothed saw is used for cutting larger branches & trunks of smaller trees up to 7 inches in diameter. This saw cuts on the pull stroke, which is opposite of American and European tools.
- Japanese Folding Pruning Saw (Ori-tatami noko) - This fine-toothed saw is used for branch pruning anything larger than your thumb & smaller than your fore-arm. This saw also cuts on the pull stroke.
- Hedge Shears (Karikomi-basami) – This is for shearing new growth (current year's growth) from certain shrubbery like dwarf myrtle, dwarf yaupon holly, green cloud sage, dwarf olives, etc. These come in both long handled/short handled with long/short blades. The long handled/long blade type is most common to the Japanese Gardener.
- Hori-Hori Knife – This wood handled tool is long & skinny with a sharp blade on one side and a serrated blade on the other. It is useful for cutting flats of grasses for planting; weeding; cutting roots in the ground; repairing sprinkler heads; and other purposes.
- Tri-Pod Ladder (Orchard Ladder) – This is a 3-legged ladder used for accessing upper areas of trees for pruning. The required method of Japanese Garden Pruning on sculpted trees is to start at the top of the tree and work down and these ladders are ideal for this.
- Bamboo Broom (Hoki) – This short broom is used for raking debris from small gravel – as its design allows for the only the debris to be removed and not the gravel. It is a tool crafted from bamboo growing in the garden.
- Woven Dust Pan (Chiri-tori) – This is a woven wide basket for debris and can double as a small tool carrier, as well.

The Hand Snips, Hedge Shears, Felcos, Japanese Pruning Saws, Bamboo Broom, Woven Dust Pan and Tri-Pod Ladder are used most often – every time a Japanese Garden Pruner works, these tools are used. The use of clean, sharpened and well-made hand tools is crucial to healthy, accurate and professional pruning. Power tools are not used in Japanese Garden Pruning & Maintenance except for the use of a chain saw for large tree removal or the use of boom buckets/lifts to access very tall trees for Aesthetic Pruning only – Fine Aesthetically Pruned (sculpted) trees are not over 12 feet tall and would not require their use, as a 12 – 14 foot tall tri-pod ladder would be used.

The Staff at Green Concepts Group has been involved with: Bonsai for over 17 years - training, developing, displaying, lecturing & teaching Bonsai; Studying, practicing Origami over 7 years; Skilled in Japanese Bamboo Fence building/knot tying; Studying Japanese Garden Design, Pruning, Techniques from classes, seminars taught by Japanese Gardeners, Builders, Pruners, Mentors; Japanese Garden Pruning experience & over 13 years of the Japanese Arts and Culture.

Resources for: Tools – Hida Tools in CA, www.hidatool.com; Magazine – Sukiya Living, www.rothteien.com; Commercial & Residential Japanese Garden Landscape Design & Maintenance – Green Concepts Group, www.greenconceptsgroupllc.com.