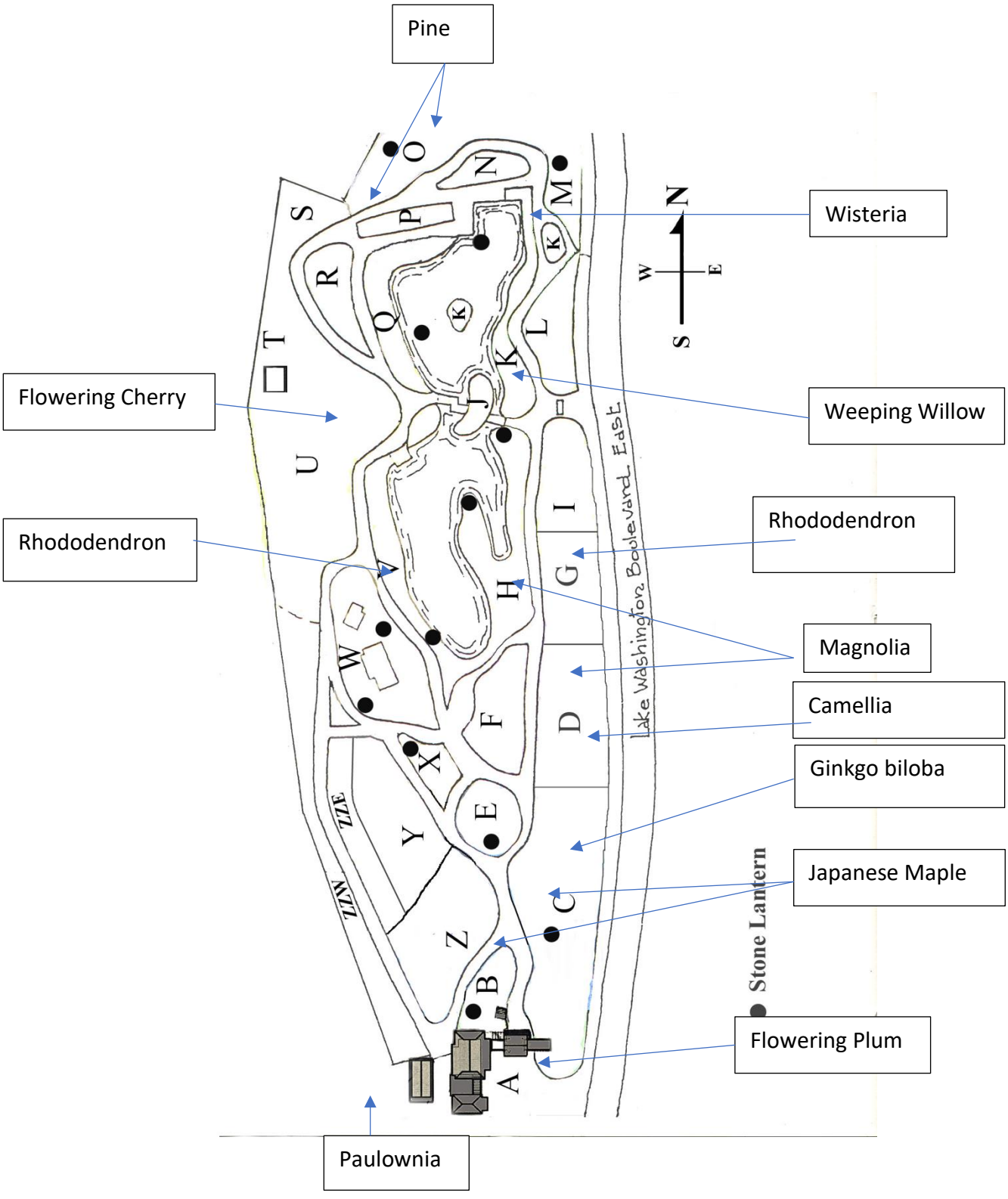
Noteworthy Plants

of the Seattle Japanese Garden

2025

SEATTLE JAPANESE GARDEN

Japanese Garden Plant Areas



Paulownia

Paulownia tomentosa is a very tall deciduous hardwood tree that's grown for its lovely display of spring flowers and as a source of lumber. Common names include empress tree, foxglove tree, princess tree, or simply paulownia. It is native to central and western China. Cultivation of paulownia in Japan, where it is known as *kiri*, dates to 200 C.E.

The genus word, *Paulownia*, is a reference to the Russian Princess Anna Pavlovna, daughter of Tsar Paul I. The hairy nature of its leaves gives this tree its species name, *tomentosa*.

Photo by Aleks Monk

Empress tree is fast growing to 40-60 feet tall at maturity. Flower buds are formed in autumn and blooming begins in May, as the leaves open. The individual foxglove-like flowers are up to two inches long and held in large panicles. Sweetly fragrant, they have a vanilla-like scent. Because species trees have characteristics that vary from one tree to another, flower colors vary from pale purple to pinkish-lavender, often with purple and yellow markings inside.

The flowers are edible and sometimes used in salads. Fruits are dry, brown, two-valved capsules, 1-2 inches long with up to 2000 small, winged seeds.

Symbolism

Traditionally, when Japanese couples have a daughter, they plant a paulownia tree. When the daughter is ready to marry, they cut down the tree and use its wood to make a dowry chest, furniture, and other items for wedding gifts. Ancient lore has it that if they planted this tree near their house, the legendary Phoenix would come across their land, bringing wisdom and prosperity to their household.

During Japan's Heian period (794-1185 C.E.), the color purple was considered a royal color, and so paulownia trees were planted at the Imperial Palace. The paulownia flower pattern with 5-7-5 leaves is reserved for the symbol of the Office of the Prime Minister of Japan. *The Tale of Genji*, the world's first novel, is the centerpiece of Heian literature, and paulownia is an abiding presence within the novel.

Commercial Value

Paulownia has the lightest wood of any tree in Japan. It is used to make chests and also to line safes because its wood cells are very porous, making it heat and fire resistant. The wood is burned to make charcoal for sketching and powder for fireworks, the bark is made into a dye, and the leaves are used to make vermicides (especially those used to kill parasitic intestinal worms). It also has excellent acoustic properties and is used to make musical instruments such as the Japanese *koto* and the Korean *zithers*. The seed pods were often used as packing material, like the foam peanuts used in modern times.

In the Seattle Japanese Garden

Photo by Aleks Monk

Our paulownia tree grows outside the Garden entrance next to the Fukuda memorial stone and plaque.

It was planted in 1987 when a rock display with plaque was installed there in honor of James K. Fukuda, the Japanese Consulate's Cultural Affairs Liaison. Fukuda was bilingual, served as Garden designer Jūki Iida's full-time translator, and was instrumental in facilitating communication among the Garden's Japanese designers and its Japanese American builders.

Prunus mume

Prunus mume is an iconic flowering tree in the culture and gardens of Japan, where it is known as *ume.* Native to China, and known there as *mei,* it has long been cultivated in both countries—beloved for its delicate, very fragrant winter flowers and prized for the many culinary uses of its small, velvety, yellow fruits.

Unfortunately, this early-flowering tree has a plethora of English common names and is most often inaccurately referred to as a "flowering plum." [Other English common names include Chinese plum, plum blossom, Japanese plum, Japanese flowering plum, Japanese flowering apricot, and flowering apricot.] However, it's neither a plum (botanically speaking, it's more closely related to apricots) nor indigenous to Japan, so "flowering apricot" is preferable.

Ume was introduced to Japan along with the cultivation of rice in about 400 BCE. Japanese households have used the green fruit produced in late May and early June to prepare *umeboshi* (salty and sour flavored pickled plum), which is served with plain rice, a culinary staple that remains popular even today. The unripe fruits are also made into *umeshu* (a sweet and fruity liqueur).

In Japan, flowering plums are traditionally pruned annually to create an attractive, picturesque habit. Very old trees are revered for the ancient appearance of their gnarled trunks and branches. Pruning also promotes flowering and fruiting.

Prunus mume **'Kobai'**

The cultivar *Prunus mume* 'Kobai' is featured in our Garden's entry courtyard. It has deep pink flowers, borne profusely on the bare branches. The flowers are semi-double, with white stamens, and have a sweet, spicy fragrance, sometimes described as "cinnamon-like."

Photo by Chie Iida

In the Pacific Northwest, flowering may begin in mild years as early as December, but more typically in February. Flowers are hardy to about 20 degrees Fahrenheit, but unopened buds will tolerate even colder temperatures. 'Kobai' often sets fruit, and its fall color is pale yellow.

Symbolism

In Japan, *Prunus mume* has always been a tree rich with symbolic meanings. Blooming at the end of winter, it's a sign of coming spring for the Japanese people, who anticipate the warmth of the new season, and celebrate the promise of life's renewal. With its delicate flowers and ancient appearance, *ume* symbolizes perseverance, hope, and the beauty that thrives under difficult

conditions. Japanese elites initially planted these trees throughout Japan as symbols of sophistication and beauty.

Woodblock triptych of a walkway through *Prunus mume* trees, *Kameido umeyashiki zenzu* (A complete view of the Plum Estate, Kameido), 1836. (Image: Utagawa Hiroshige, Library of Congress collection: Fine Prints: Japanese, pre-1915)

In *haiku* poetry, *ume* became a season word (*kigo*) for early spring. And during the Nara period (710-794 C.E.), several important families chose it for their crests (*umemon*).

In the Seattle Japanese Garden

Three specimens of *Prunus mume* 'Kobai' were planted in 2020 in our Garden's courtyard outside the entry gate, in a row along Lake Washington Boulevard. Though their fragrant, deep pink flowers open during our Garden's winter closure, they are visible for passers-by to enjoy.

Photo by Chie Iida

This courtyard planting was intentional. Together with an existing Japanese black pine (*Pinus thunbergii*) and bamboo, *ume* forms a trio known in China as the Three Friends of Winter and in Japan as the Three Auspicious Friends. Thriving even in winter's harshness, together they embody the qualities of steadfastness, perseverance, and resilience.

Japanese Maples

The Japanese love to tell a story about Sen-no-Rikyu, a famous sixteenth century Japanese tea master, who had just finished sweeping the garden in preparation for a tea ceremony. It looked clean yet soulless, so he flung two or three of the red maple leaves he had swept up onto the clear mossy ground.

Maple leaves often turn red as chlorophyll is withdrawn from the leaves and the trees shut down for the winter. Color change is triggered by temperature and length of day changes. The sharp points of the leaves are probably the origin of the maple's genus name *Acer* ("sharp").

The Seattle Japanese Garden has 34 different types of maples. Today we will explore two of them: laceleaf Japanese maple and fullmoon maple.

Acer palmatum var. *dissectum*

There are three laceleaf Japanese maples as you enter the Garden. Two red-leaved specimens (known as *Acer palmatum* var. *dissectum atropurpureum*) are located across the main path from one another. A smaller tree with green foliage (the cultivar 'Viridis') is located on the east side of the path. All are forms of *Acer palmatum* var. *dissectum*.

Photo by Aurora Santiago

This strongly cascading tree has long, drooping branchlets that form a dome-shaped plant at maturity. It often reaches up to 12 feet tall and at least as wide. The leaves have seven to nine lobes and each separates entirely to the petiole attachment.

Acer palmatum var. *dissectum* is the most familiar form of Japanese maple and occurs naturally with red or green foliage. Many named cultivars have been developed. All are grown for their attractive foliage, low-spreading shape, and the beautiful "living architecture" of their branching. Specimen plants, over 75 years of age, possess a magnificent stateliness.

These trees can be used as focal points or accent plants near the home or in the garden. They are at their best as sun-dappled understory plants. The dissected foliage and cascading form can be showcased by siting them near a pond or water garden. Smaller plants can be effective in containers. Once the autumn foliage has fallen, their characteristic shapely, twisting branch scaffolding carries their beauty on through the dormant season.

Pruning

The laceleaf Japanese maple requires careful pruning and removal of dead leaves and debris to expose its contorted trunks and branches. Young plants should be staked or grafted high on a standard so they will attain some height from which to cascade.

Acer japonicum

Acer japonicum, known as fullmoon maple, is a sturdy, multi-stemmed deciduous tree native to mountain woodlands on the Japanese islands of Honshu and Hokkaido. It also grows in Manchuria and Korea. In the wild, a height of 45 feet is not unusual, but in cultivation it's much smaller. Delicate, purplish red flowers are held in large drooping clusters (*corymbs*), appearing before the leaves. Most trees have leaves that are shallowly divided into nine to eleven lobes, dissected less than half-way to their base. Their shallow lobes and almost circular shape resemble the full moon and the rounded leaves of our native vine maple.

***Acer japonicum* 'Vitifolium'**

Beyond the laceleaf Japanese maple on the right side of our Garden's entry path is a very large fullmoon maple cultivar, *Acer japonicum* 'Vitifolium'. It is upright in habit and becomes broad and round-topped with age, reaching at least 30 feet tall. As the cultivar name implies, the large, deep green leaves resemble the grape genus *Vitis*, hence its common name: grape leaf fullmoon maple.

Fall colors are magnificent. The golds predominate at first, with strong tones of crimson and scarlet, changing to a vivid scarlet before the leaves drop.

Photos by Aleks Monk

Camellia

Camellia is a genus of over 250 species of long-lived broadleaf evergreen shrubs and small trees. They are found in acidic soil in woodland areas throughout Asia. More than 20,000 cultivars are known. The genus name *Camellia* acknowledges Georg Josef Kamel (1706), a Jesuit missionary and naturalist who introduced Philippine flora to Europe.

Camellias have been important plants in Japan for centuries, valued for their usefulness for tea and oil long before they were cultivated as ornamentals. Records show a camellia was presented to the Japanese emperor in 685 C.E. They have traditionally been planted in gardens and parks as focal points, shade trees, and in hedges. Their flowering branches with their glossy leaves are featured in *ikebana* (Japanese flower arranging). The camellia motif can be found on ceramics, screens, decorative fabrics, and as family crests (called *Kamon*). Japanese poetry collections from the 8th century include poems about camellias. Ohshima Island, off the Pacific coast of Japan, is famous for its camellia gardens, including some camellia trees more than 400 years old.

The Seattle Japanese Garden has four species—*Camellia japonica* (Japanese camellia, which blooms from the end of winter into spring), *Camellia sasanqua* (sasanqua camellia, which blooms in fall and winter), *Camellia oleifera* (oil-seed camellia, which blooms in fall and early winter), and *Camellia sinensis* (tea camellia, which blooms in late summer). We have 14 different cultivars of *Camellia japonica* and five different cultivars of *Camellia sasanqua*. Our focus in this class is on *Camellia japonica* and its lovely cultivar 'Purity' or '*Shiragiku*'.

Photo by Aleks Monk

Camellia japonica

As an ornamental, *Camellia japonica* is arguably the most important camellia species in Japan. Its Japanese name, *tsubaki,* was in use as early as 733 C.E. Cultivation dates back more than a thousand years, beginning with efforts to breed plants with larger, showier flowers for temple gardens and the homes of the nobility. Over the centuries, thousands of cultivars were developed, their blooms characterized by an ever-expanding range of color and form. Notably, the *samurai* (warriors) in the 12th century grew Japanese camellia for their garden displays and for flower arranging, and it was further developed in the Edo period (1603-1867 C.E.), when stroll gardens, such as ours, became popular.

Camellia japonica 'Purity' or '*Shiragiku*'

Camellia japonica 'Purity' is a very old cultivar, dating back to before 1681, when it was first described in the *Kada-Kōmoku* plant guide as '*Shiragiku*' (meaning white chrysanthemum), although to us it may look more like a gardenia flower. This striking cultivar flowers in March-April. It has 3-3 ½ inch formal double (or rose-form) flowers that are a pure white.

It is located north of the entrance gate on the east side of the path, by the Western Red Cedar, where it was planted in 1961 as a mature plant.

Symbolism

In Japan *Camelia japonica* has a place of honor as a flower emblem of the *Shinto* goddess of the sun, a mythical ancestor of the imperial family.

The best *haiku* (a form of Japanese poetry) about *Cameillia japonica* are concerned with their falling flowers, which fall from the tree in one piece, rather than petal by petal. In early Japan, this evoked the sudden decapitation that was the fate of many warriors or their victims. When leaving for war, the *samurai* were advised to avoid contact with camellias, notwithstanding that they were planted in their gardens. Even now, hospital visitors avoid bringing camellia flowers to patients.

Ginkgo biloba

Ginkgo biloba, commonly known as maidenhair tree or simply ginkgo, is one of the most unusual and striking plants in the Seattle Japanese Garden. Cherished especially in the fall along with Japanese maples, ginkgo foliage turns brilliant yellow-gold. Soon after, all the leaves seem to fall at once and form a bright carpet beneath the trees.

Juki Iida included *Ginkgo biloba* in his garden design when the Garden was constructed in 1960. Three mature trees grow on the east side of the garden along the path southeast of the pond.

Ancient Forest

Ginkgo has a unique place in the evolutionary history of our planet. The single species developed along with pre-historic conifer-like trees over 200 million years ago before modern conifers, dinosaurs, and insects arose. Fossils of *ginkgo biloba* are found around the world, including the Ginkgo Petrified Forest near Vantage, Washington.

The species withstood numerous mass extinctions, including that of the dinosaurs, and flourished until the ice ages limited its range. Because some ginkgo trees survived in a few areas of China with persistent temperate climate, we can enjoy this living "fossil" today.

Photo by Aleks Monk, 11/8/14

Cultivation

Their existence under cultivation in China began about a thousand years ago. In the 15th century, specimens from China arrived in Japan, where they were often planted within temple or shrine grounds. Considered sacred, the ginkgo tree, a symbol of resilience, health and longevity, is also associated with hope and fertility.

In the early 1700s, collectors introduced specimens to biological gardens in Utrecht and London. Designated *ginkgo biloba* by Carol Linnaeus in 1771, "ginkgo" derives from a Japanese word meaning silver apricot (after the appearance of its fruit), and "biloba" derives from the horticultural term meaning two-lobed, referring to the leaf shape.

Foliage and Uses

The ginkgo's fan-shaped foliage is distinctive. Flat broad leaves have radiating veins that are often notched or grooved in the middle and attach to the branch either by long slender stems or in clusters at the ends of shorter stems, similar to the leaflets of maidenhair ferns.

Photo by Mary Ann Cahill, 11/3/12

The ginkgo leaf motif was important in Japan, as seen in paintings and family crests, and was incorporated into textile designs in kimonos, etched on swords, and used in jewelry. The Arts and Crafts movement in the West in the early 20th century used it in art and architecture.

In Japan today, ginkgo trees are common along streets and in parks. Used in traditional East Asian medicine, extract from ginkgo leaves can be found in health supplements. The nut-like kernels taken from the seeds are in remedies for various medical conditions and are found in soups, stir-fries and desserts, where they are relished for their mild slightly sweet flavor.

Growth and Propagation

The tree develops slowly into a tall pyramidal form and broadens as it ages. Over time, specimens reach 100 feet in height and may spread even wider. With maturity, deep furrows form in its brown or gray corky bark.

The trees are separate male or female individuals, which is relatively unusual among seed-bearing plants. Outside Asia, because of the malodorous fruits produced on female trees, the preferred male trees are propagated from cuttings. They grow best in full sun with regular moisture, but adapt to partial shade and any fertile, well-drained soil. In the Pacific Northwest ginkgo is remarkably drought-tolerant. Resistant to damage by bacteria, viruses and fungi, it also releases chemicals that deter insects.

Ginkgos are tolerant of extreme adverse human-made conditions as well, including the 1945 atomic explosion at Hiroshima. A seedling grown from a ginkgo tree that survived that event has been planted in the parking lot just south of the Garden, where the thriving young tree is marked with a stone and plaque telling of its origin.

The Genus *Rhododendron*

The genus *Rhododendron* includes both "true" rhododendrons and azaleas. Important design elements within the Seattle Japanese Garden, rhododendrons and azaleas constitute its largest collection of plants (currently more than 550) in a single genus. Most are broadleaf evergreens, arguably the most important plant type in Japanese-style gardens. In addition, the majority were likely planted in 1960 when the Garden was created, or in its first few years.

Originally in a genus of their own, azaleas were reclassified in the 19th century. Now they're included in the genus *Rhododendron*, and azalea is only a common name. Here's a summary of the major differences:

> "True" rhododendrons often become much larger plants, and may grow tree-like, with thicker foliage, thicker branches, and a more open habit. Some species and many of the hybrids have flowers in large, dome-shaped *trusses* (flowers held together in a cluster). Azaleas are often smaller, shorter and more shrublike. Evergreen azaleas tend to have twiggy branches and small leaves, which give them a more delicate appearance than that of most rhododendrons. Many azaleas are deciduous—but rhododendrons, with a few exceptions, are usually evergreen.

Evergreen Azalea—*Rhododendron* 'Quakeress'

Rhododendron 'Quakeress' is the most prominent of the Garden's bi-colored evergreen azaleas. More than ten specimens, planted in 1961, line the pond's western shore. Like most of the Garden's evergreen azaleas, they're pruned in the *tamamono* style (low, rounded, and wider than tall). This exceptional cultivar usually blooms in May (sometimes in April), with pink and white flowers that display striking and variable color patterns.

'Quakeress' is one of 454 Glenn Dale hybrids, which were developed in the 1930s at the U.S. Arboretum Plant Introduction Station in Glenn Dale, Maryland. In the following years, they were released throughout the U.S., notably to arboretums and botanic gardens, including the Washington Park Arboretum. Dozens of azaleas from this program were planted in the Seattle Japanese Garden.

Created from complex crosses, 'Quakeress' shares one parent with the important Satsuki hybrids of Japan. The latter originated about 500 years ago.

The original Satsuki azaleas were naturally occurring hybrids of *Rhododendron indicum* and *Rhododendron tamurae*. They have compact and twiggy habits, and bloom in late May or June, many with attractive color patterning. Thus, the Japanese began a long tradition of breeding plants with multiple flower patterns (including solids, stripes, flakes, lines, sectors, and margins) on a single plant. Not particularly stable, these patterns would vary significantly from year to year. After years of careful observation and breeding efforts, they developed a detailed system of

classification—including more than 20 color pattern categories with evocative names—such as s*okojiro* (white throat), *hakeme shibori* (brush variegation) and *fukiage shibori* (fountain variegation). In the Seattle Japanese Garden, these cherished Japanese flower patterns are embodied in the U.S.- bred evergreen azalea ‘Quakeress’.

Deciduous Azaleas

Deciduous azaleas are also important shrubs in Japanese-style gardens. Iida’s planting list includes five species, all planted in the Garden’s early years.

Rhododendron—*Rhododendron* ‘Unique’

The plants we recognize as “true” rhododendrons were not traditionally planted in the gardens of Japan, but when the Seattle Japanese Garden was created the broadleaf evergreens essential to Japanese gardens were not available. Rhododendrons, however, were popular and available in the Seattle area, so landscape designer Jūki Iida agreed that they could serve as substitutes.

One of the Garden’s “true” rhododendrons is the lovely cultivar *Rhododendron* ‘Unique’. Nine specimens are planted here, all located east of the central pond and its east side path. They were likely planted at least several decades after the Garden’s creation.

Long popular in the Pacific Northwest, ‘Unique’ has charming, medium-sized flowers and oval, very attractive evergreen leaves. Its flowers, ivory-white flushed with pink, open in April or early May from pale salmon-pink buds. Well-grown plants bloom profusely and have a compact, rounded, densely foliaged habit, to about 4 feet tall and wide in 10 years. But plants continue growing, becoming much larger than their “10-year size.” Over time, some areas of the Garden have become crowded and densely shaded. As a result, many of its ‘Unique’ rhododendrons have lost their typically dense, compact habit.

Significance of the Collection and Future Challenges

The Seattle Japanese Garden’s rhododendrons and azaleas are much more than a botanical collection. Their flowering season begins in winter and extends until summer, with one or more plants in bloom throughout that period—a gift of beauty, color, joy, and change to all who visit.

Yet Peter Putnicki, former Senior Gardener (2015-2024), reminded us that he was “constantly engaged in refining, adjusting and thinking about the dynamic, active and living aspect” of the Garden. Future challenges include the aging of the Garden’s rhododendrons and azaleas and the search for appropriate replacements.

Photos by Aleks Monk

Weeping Willow

Salix babylonica

Salix babylonica is a fast-growing deciduous tree with upright catkins. In English, its common name is weeping willow. In Japanese, the name is *shidare yanagi*.

Photo by Aleks Monk

The genus word *Salix* comes from the Celtic word for willow, *sallis.* It consists of *sal* ("near") and *lis* ("water"), a reference to the moist or wet habitats of most willows.

Although *Salix babylonica* is native to China, it is now known only in cultivation. Its original habitat cannot be determined. When planted along streams, ponds**,** or other bodies of water, its weeping form is quite beautiful. In Japan, weeping willow is also planted as a street tree and its branches are used for basket weaving.

The species word *babylonica* was given to the tree by the botanist Carl Linnaeus, known as the creator of modern biological nomenclature. He mistakenly believed that this willow was the tree described in the Bible in the opening lines of Psalm 137 (King James Version, 1611): "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof." However, the trees growing in Babylon, along the Euphrates River in ancient Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), are not willows. They're the Euphrates poplar, *Populus euphratica,* with willow-like leaves on long, drooping shoots.

In the Seattle Japanese Garden

The Garden's weeping willow was originally planted leaning diagonally over the water to suggest movement, but some years ago it toppled and fell into the pond. It was given a support pole, with the hope that it would recover. Although the roots seemed damaged and the trunk totally hollowed out, it developed a secondary root system and survived. Now it leans almost horizontally.

According to Masa Mizuno, our Japanese garden consultant, this willow is a very high maintenance tree. During the Garden's winter closure, the gardeners place ladders in the water to get access to the branches. They prune to remove the new branches from the inside, leaving only the branches at the end to hang down gracefully.

Symbolism and Representation in the Arts

The following is a story, rich with symbolism, of a great calligrapher, a frog, and a willow tree:

"Ono no Tofu, a 10th-century calligrapher and statesman, seven times failed to achieve promotion at the imperial court. Leaving the palace one day, he noticed a frog attempting to leap up to the branch of a willow tree. Seven times the frog leaped; seven times it failed. On the eighth try it succeeded, and Ono no Tofu took heart…"

Making his own eighth attempt, he gained the promotion. Eventually, after a distinguished career, he was acknowledged as the founder of Japanese style calligraphy (*wayōshodō*). Centuries later, he continued to serve as a model for young children learning to write.

Woodcut print by Totoya Hokkei, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: "Ono no Tofu Standing on the Bank of a Stream and Watching a Frog Leap to Catch a Willow Branch," ca. 1825

Wisteria

Wisteria floribunda

Wisteria floribunda, called *fuji* or *noda fuji* in Japanese, is native to Japan. It is a woody, vigorous, twining climber with profuse purple flowers blooming in chains that sometimes trail 8 to 20 inches in April and May. *Fuji* was especially popular in the 11th Century Heian court, where, it is said, the governing Fujiwara clan (see crest in the Symbolism section, below) held flower viewing parties under a wisteria trellis. While not as well-known as cherry blossom viewing, wisteria viewing is popular in Japan today. Our wisteria trellis, called *fujidana* in Japanese, was created in 1960, when the Garden opened.

Photo by Aurora Santiago

Symbolism

Wisteria floribunda has been cultivated in Japan for over 1,200 years. It was mentioned in ancient Japanese literature and praised for its beauty, beginning with the *Kojki* (translated as *Records of Ancient Matters*) compiled in 712 C.E. from oral traditions. It can be very long lived. The Ashikaga Flower Park in Japan has a 150-year-old wisteria with a canopy of more than 1000 square yards.

Wisteria is the botanical name of the genus, and other *Wisteria* species are native to the eastern United States (*Wisteria frutescens*) and parts of Asia, outside of Japan. *Wisteria* honors Dr. Caspar Wistar (1761-1818), a professor of Anatomy at the University of Pennsylvania.

Wisteria has a long history in Japanese culture. In the world's first novel, *The Tale of Genji* (about 1000 C.E.), the heroine is named Murasaki ("lavender") for the color of wisteria flowers, as was the court-name of the author, Murasaki Shikibu, herself a Fujiwara.

Fujiwara Family Crest (*kamon*)

The famous 1820s Kabuki dance *Fuji Musume* ("wisteria maiden") is derived from the 17th century *otsu-e* folk life paintings of a maiden dancing while holding a wisteria branch. Wisteria is often planted in the gardens around Buddhist shrines and temples, based on the story of Amitabha Buddha, who was thought to have come down to earth on a purple cloud to show people the path to paradise. The gracefulness of the flower branches makes wisteria a popular motif for pottery and textiles. Wisteria's mystique carries on to Japanese contemporary culture, where it is the basis for a 2022 anime feature, *Demon Slayer* (yes, wisteria seeds really are poisonous).

In the Seattle Japanese Garden

Our wisteria trellis is located at an important juncture in the stroll garden: where the garden changes styles. Walking north from the Garden's entrance, one starts on rustic gravel paths, glimpsing forests and passing by streams. Then, the path travels past stones stylistically placed to suggest a cobble beach (*suhama*), pines trimmed to suggest windswept shorelines, and azaleas pruned as spherical rocks (*tamamono*). Finally, just past the natural willow, the wisteria trellis introduces a new, clearly human-oriented area with formalized, constructed features, called *shin* style: the trellis, paved stone paths, and the walls of the fishing village and harbor.

Photo by Mary Ann Cahill

Jūki Iida, the garden designer who oversaw creation of our Garden, writes: "At the side of the harbor the wisteria trellis is set for the pleasure seekers of the village." Looking across the lake, one sees a complimentary human structure, the *azumaya*, another site designed for humans contemplating our relationship with nature.

Japanese Black Pine and Japanese Red Pine

Pine trees are well-known and beloved evergreen *conifers* (cone-bearing woody plants), renowned for their toughness and adaptability. They also develop striking character with age, especially with skillful pruning or the effects of temperature and wind.

Pines are the most dominant native plant in Japan and the most important tree in Japanese gardens. Known as *matsu*, they are strongly associated with Japan's original religion, Shintō, which viewed pines as *yorishiro*—that is, a place capable of attracting the gods (*kami*). In fact, the word *matsu* means "waiting for a god's soul to descend from heaven." In Japan, *matsu* are associated with endurance and longevity.

The two species of pine most important in Japanese gardens are *Pinus thunbergii* (*kuro matsu*, translated as "Japanese black pine," and a seacoast native) and *Pinus densiflora* (*aka matsu*, translated as "Japanese red pine," and native to low mountains and hillsides). In gardens, they're traditionally used to represent these native habitats.

Pinus thunbergii

Japanese black pine is planted in four areas of our Garden, most prominently along the east side of the pond to suggest the seacoast, but the oldest, most important one is located above the pond's northwest corner.

Photo by Aleks Monk

Its densely crowded, dark green needles are held in bundles of two. They are 2 ½ – 4 ½ inches long, stiff, sharply pointed, outward-spreading and often slightly twisted. The upright leaf buds (*candles*) are silvery white and pointed. Old trees develop blackish-gray bark, deeply fissured into irregular plates—hence the common name black pine.

Historically, *Pinus thunbergii* was widely planted throughout Japan, highly valued for its strong, rugged form. It was planted as a street tree and in temple gardens, serving as a boundary marker at Shintō shrines, and used for hedges and windbreaks.

Pinus densiflora

Japanese red pine is planted throughout the Seattle Japanese Garden, but the specimen planted next to the north end path and close to our venerable *Pinus thunbergii* is a good one to show to visitors.

The needles of Japanese red pine are 3 - 5 inches long, soft, and bright green, appearing finer and more delicate than those of black pine. They are also held in bundles of two, but the upright leaf buds lack the showy silvery coloration of black pine *candles*. The common name, red pine, derives from the distinctive orangish to orangish-red color of young bark, which peels off in thin scales. With age, the bark lowest on the trunk becomes grayish, divided into oblong plates.

Photo by Aleks Monk

Pinus densiflora was historically important as timber, used to construct buildings and bridges. It was also used to make musical instruments and other products. Aesthetically and spiritually, it was greatly valued as an ornamental tree, planted in both private and temple gardens.

Symbolism

Japanese black pine is also referred to as *o matsu* (the male pine), and Japanese red pine as *me matsu* (the female pine). Their needle qualities, bark colors and branching habits are significantly different. Historically, these differences were believed to express the "masculine" or "feminine" nature of each species.

In traditional Japanese gardens, both species are pruned twice each year to express their essential natures and reveal the effects of their environments. Black pines especially are shaped to represent the dwarf, contorted forms created by battering seacoast winds.

In the Seattle Japanese Garden

The *Pinus thunbergii* at the north end of the Garden was a gift in 1993 from Richard Yamasaki, whose landscape company was one of three contractors chosen to create the Garden in 1959-60. This venerable pine was planted at his home, and Yamasaki gave it to the Seattle Japanese Garden when he moved away. It was successfully transplanted when it was over 80 years old. The following quotation from the 11th century Japanese document, *Sakuteiki* ("Records of Garden Making," the oldest surviving treatise on Japanese gardening) could be describing this very special tree:

> "The trees need not be too tall, but they should be old, splendid in form, and laden with deep green needles."

Here, in the Seattle Japanese Garden, the main pruning of the pines takes place in November. Yet throughout the year, we benefit from thinking about that process and its importance in shaping the reality of our Garden. In the words of former Senior Gardener Peter Putnicki:

> "The Garden is a cherished institution, but also a dynamic living thing; balancing respect, a thorough knowledge, and taste is a crucial and difficult task, and we all strive to help this Garden to excel."

Flowering Cherry Trees

Prunus is a large genus that includes cherries, plums and peaches. *Prunus* Accolade and *Prunus* Snow Goose—the latest trees to grace the Garden's orchard—are flowering cherries. The people of China, Korea, and Japan have admired the flowers of cherry trees for over 1300 years. The term *sato-zakura*, meaning "village-cherries," refers to flowering cherries of garden origin that are grown for their floral display. These trees do not occur in the wild but are developed from complex crosses involving various cherry tree species native to or naturalized in Japan. In botanical terms, they're known as **cultivars**.

***Prunus* 'Accolade'**

Photo by Niall Dunne

Accolade originated at Knapp Hill Nursery, England in 1952 as a cross of *P. sargentii* x *P. subhirtella*. Accolade was awarded the First Class Certificate in 1954 and the RHS Award of Garden Merit in 1952 and 2002. Accolade flowers in March with dark-pink buds that open to soft-pink, semi-double flowers and grows to about 25 feet with an open and airy crown. The bark is attractive, smooth, reddish-brown, and marked with horizontal lenticels (raised pores). Two specimens of this cultivar have been putting on a lovely show at the north end of Azalea Way in the larger Arboretum for more than 50 years!

Prunus 'Snow Goose'

Snow Goose is a hybrid between *Prunus speciosa* and *Prunus incisa* (Kuitert 1999) and was raised by A. Doorenbos of Holland (Jacobson 1996). It is a more upright tree, growing to 20 feet tall, that blooms early in the season before the foliage appears and bears pure-white, single flowers that show a typical reddening of the center at the end of flowering (typical of *Prunus incisa*, one of its parents). Mature specimens have beautiful, coppery-red, glossy, peeling bark.

Photo from https://landscapeplants.oregonstate.edu/plants/prunus-snow-goose.

Symbolism

Cherry trees have an important cultural significance in Asia, especially in Japan. "The beauty of the cherry blossom is a potent symbol equated with the evanescence of human life and epitomizes the transformation of Japanese culture throughout the ages" (National Park Service History of the Cherry Tree).

In medieval Japan, the warrior class (*samurai)* used the cherry blossom to symbolize the essence of the *samurai*. The cherry flower is beautiful, complex and short lived. To the *samurai*, this quality represented a glorious death in battle, before reaching old age.

Cherry blossom viewing (*Hanami*—literally, “flower-viewing”) remains an important spring ritual in Japan. In the Heian Period (794–1185 A.D.), it was celebrated only by the imperial family, but eventually all Japanese people observed this tradition. Today, people of all ages stroll or sit under the flowering trees and celebrate with meals, toasts, music, *haiku* poetry, or simply enjoy the exquisite, all-too-brief display. Unlike plants with flowers that wither and die on the tree, the cherry blossom sheds its flower petals at the peak of their beauty in just one or two weeks. For the Japanese, this fragile loveliness symbolizes the fleeting quality of life.

In the Seattle Japanese Garden

The Seattle Japanese Garden was originally planted with *Prunus x yedoensis* 'Akebono' trees. Over the years, many died from disease and were replaced with *Prunus serrulata* ‘Kwanzan’ and ‘Shirotae’. In the summer of 2022, the orchard area was completely renovated to improve the soil and to correct drainage problems. As part of that project, the cherry trees planted between 1988 and 2006 were removed. Accolade and Snow Goose were planted as the final step in the orchard renovation that spanned more than a year. According to Pete Putnicki, the Garden’s previous head gardener who led the renovation, “We went with just two cultivars because our priority with this planting was to create a beautiful ornamental composition, more than a botanical collection.” His vision is now a beautiful reality.

Other Notable Plants of Japanese-style Gardens

Bamboo. There are many species of bamboo native to Japan's temperate regions, but only the shorter and less aggressive types are commonly used in traditional Japanese gardens. As a grass with a hollow stem, bamboo represents the quality of resilience and is valued for its supple nature and for its qualities of movement and sound. Its woody stems are used to construct garden elements such as fences, gates, and walls.

Styrax japonicus, Japanese snowbell (*ego-no-ki*), is a deciduous, flowering and fruiting tree, native of Asia, growing to 30 feet tall and wide with a graceful branching habit. Bark is greyish with fine, cinnamon-colored fissures. By June, clusters of fragrant, white flowers with yellow stamens hang from branches "like clouds of sleeping butterflies" (p 59, Tripp and Raulston, 1995). Elliptical shaped leaves emerge chartreuse, turn green then yellow in autumn. Olive shaped fruits follow. *S. japonicus* prefers a sunny, open woodland as seen near the SJG pond. Summer watering is helpful. It is hardy to Zones 5-9, disease resistant, and tolerates stress as it is also seen growing in parking strips.

Iris. The Japanese iris now known as *Iris ensata* (*hanashobu* in Japan) blooms in early summer. It's an iconic element in Japanese gardens, with references in Japanese literature that date back to at least the 12th century. In Japan, and in Japanese-style gardens elsewhere, *Iris ensata* is often used in mass plantings on the edges of ponds or beside small streams, sometimes next to *yatsuhashi* (zigzag) bridges. There are many Japanese iris plantings along our Garden's central pond.

Magnolia. Magnolias are flowering trees or shrubs with lovely pink, purple, yellow, or white flowers. They are planted in Japan in gardens, parks, and as street trees. Our Garden contains two forms of the hybrid *Magnolia x soulangeana* (saucer magnolia)—a long-lived, vigorous, multi-stemmed small tree that matures at about 25 feet tall and wide. Saucer magnolia is popular in Japan and worldwide for its ease of cultivation and ability to begin flowering at an early age. Its large, fragrant, tulip-shaped spring blooms are creamy-white, with pink or burgundy markings.

Moss. There are over 12,000 species of moss—ancient plants, even older than ferns. Lacking true roots and a vascular system, they grow on top of the soil.

Known as *koke* in Japan, moss is an integral part of most Japanese gardens. It lends a feeling of antiquity and harmony to the garden; it knits rock to earth and pulls individual plants into unified compositions. As moss absorbs sound and exhales moisture, it brings a calming quality to the garden.

Water lily. *Nymphaea* has been the Seattle Japanese Garden's "mud flower" since the Garden opened in 1960. Its beautiful white or pink flowers open in July—floating on the pond's surface yet rooted in the mud below.

In the gardens of Japan, however, the aquatic plant most often used is sacred lotus (*Nelumbo*). It isn't cold hardy in Seattle and would have to be re-planted annually, so water lily replaces it here. Both are used to signify the transformation to purity.

Photos are from the Seattle Japanese Garden website's Blog and the SJG Community Bloom Blog.

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Glossary of Plant Terms

ACER	**Genus of the maple; Latin *acies* 'sharp' points of maple leaves**
ACIDIC SOIL	**Technical term that describes the chemical reaction that occurs when a proton donor is added to soil.[1] Acid soils have a pH below 7; alkaline soils have a pH above 7. Plants rely upon a range of soil chemicals available for uptake by their roots for soil/plant fertility**
AZALEA	**Azaleas are included in the genus *Rhododendron*. Azalea is now a common name for this type of *Rhododendron*. They are distinguished from "true" rhododendrons by having only five anthers per flower.**
CAMELLIA	**An evergreen genus named by Linneaus for a botanist Georg Joseph Kamel; the sinensis variety is of great economic importance in East Asia and India, leaves of which are processed into the beverage tea. Flowers range from white through pink/red with a dense collection of petals that contrast a bouquet of yellow stamens**
CHLOROPHYLL	**Photosynthetic green pigment in chloroplasts that allows plants or algae to absorb energy from sun light**
CANDLES	**Upright terminal leaf buds on pine branches[2]**
CATKIN	**Spike of a flowering tree or shrub (especially a willow or birch) after fruiting," 1570s, from Dutch katteken "flowering stem of willow, birch, hazel, etc.," literally "kitten". So called for their soft, furry appearance**
COMMON NAME	**as opposed to scientific botanical name**
CONIFERS	**A group of cone-bearing seed plants**
CULTIVAR	**Plant selected for desired traits that are retained when reproduced; cultivar names are written with single quotation marks.**
DECIDUOUS	**Type of woody plant that sheds its leaves usually in fall; in dry regions plants shed leaves until drought ends**
DENSIFLORA	**Latin meaning densely flowered; when used in Pinus densiflora, meaning many cones (not flowers)**
DIMORPHIC	**Having two distinct forms**
DISSECTED FOLIAGE	**Thread-like leaf of Japanese Maple deeply cut to base of leaf with 7-9lobes[3]**
EVERGREEN	**Type of woody plant that retains its foliage throughout the seasons**

[1] Soil pH: Wikipedia.org/wiki/Soil/_pH; Soil acidification: Wikipedia.org/wiki/Soil+acidification; Alkalai soil: Wikipedia.org/wiki/Alkali_soil

[2] For color photo: www.pnwplants.wsu.edu/Details.aspx?ImageID=1270,

[3] www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?taxonid=259409

ENDEMIC	**Occurs naturally in a particular geographic region, habitat or soil type. See native**
FISSURED PLATES	**Irregular plates on pine bark.**
GENUS	**Plant group able to breed among themselves and bearing mutual resemblances**
HAIKU	**Japanese poetic form**
KOBUSHI	**Japanese word meaning 'fist'**
LINNEAUS	**Karl von Linne (1707-1778), Swedish physician, botanist, zoologist, taxologist, acclaimed as one of the greatest scientists in Europe. First published *Systema Naturae* in 1738 in Netherlands. Known as Father of modern taxonomy.[4]**
LOBE	**Part of a leaf which is divided by clefts, pinnately or palmately**
MACHIAI	**Waiting arbor in traditional Japanese Tea Garden**
MATSU	**Name for Japanese Pine; 'waiting for Shinto God to descend from Heaven'**
NATIVE	**Naturally occurring in an area, originating from a particular geographical or geological area**
OKARIKOMI	**Japanese clipping style evoking ocean waves or distant mount ranges**
PETIOLE	**Leaf stalk that connects the blade to the stem**
PHOTOSYNTHESIS	**Process by which plants are able to change energy from sun light into chemical energy and used to produce carbohydrates**
POLLINATED	**Pollen is transferred from the anther (male organ) to the stigma (female organ)**
RHODODENDRON	**Rhododendron is a genus of evergreen or deciduous woody plants native to Himalaya region including East Asia. It is the Washington State flower, Azaleas are grouped in the genus Rhododendron**
SAKUTEIKI	**Manual of garden design originally compiled in Heian period. Oldest version, hand painted on two scrolls, dates to 13th century; several editions exist since 17th century known as "Notes on Garden Making".[5]**
SEN-NO-RIKYU	**Influential Tea Master (1522-1591, best known for ceremonies in tiny tea rooms, emphasizing rustic simplicity with handmade Japanese tea wares.[6]**
SPECIES	**Basic unit of plant classification; smallest group of plants capable of**

[4] https://en.wikipedia,org/wiki/Carl_Linnaeus

[5] Kuitert, Wybe, THEMES IN HISTORY OF JAPANESE GARDEN ART: U Hawaii Press: Honolulu, 2022, pp 27-52. To understand garden-making milieu among Fujiwara clan aristocrats ruling during Heian, principally compiled by a bastard grandson of great Fujiwara Michinaga, later in life accepted as legitimate son of Yorimichi. Named Fujiwara Toshitsuna (1028-1094), he is thought to be the aristocratic Fujiwara author who painted these scrolls.

[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sen_no_Rikyu

	Inter-breeding and producing fertile offspring.[7]
SUHAMA	***Suhama* denotes a beach consisting of a sand bar jutting out into the sea; in Japanese gardens it indicates a pebbled beach sloping gently into a pond, serving both to protect the shore and enhance the view**
TAMAMONO	**Japanese shearing term to achieve a round, low dense form**
THUNBERGII	**Species of pine, named after Karl Peter von Thunberg, botanist, who studied under Carl Linnaeus at Uppsala University. He introduced European vegetable seeds, enhancing Japanese horticulture. Thunberg's honors as an Englightenment scholar, led to fame that resulted in naming 245 species of both plants/animals after him**
TRUSSES	**Compact cluster of flowers arising from a single center, eg. Rhododendrons**
YORISHIRO	**A place capable of attracting Shinto Gods (*kami)***

[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms. For benefit of 2023 docent trainees, this is where most botanical terms can be found on line.