

The Asian Garden

Asian Garden Construction

Formal Japanese gardens, such as demonstrated in Manito Park, have rather specific construction rules, right down to the size and placement of stones in a waterfall. There are several styles of Japanese gardens, mainly intended to mimic the major landscape features and ecologies of Japan.*

In our area, most people choose to have an Asian feel, rather than a formal Japanese garden. Perhaps a granite lantern or pagoda, a stone bridge, a corner of the garden dominated by bamboo. Our Ponderosa pines, like the pines of Japan, lend themselves to gardens with an Asian flavor.

Plant Materials

Tower Perennial Gardens provided the majority of the plant material for Denver Botanic Gardens latest garden addition, PlantAsia. The material was our selection but emphasized plants native to Japan, Korea and China.

Bamboo is not nearly as invasive in a cold climate. In a protected site, you may need to use bamboo barrier at the time of planting to control spread (a special product that is buried about 30" and has 5 or 6" left above ground to capture surface runners.) Most of our area does not require this product. Also, we stock many bamboos that are clump forming and do not run. Some bamboo is sun tolerant, some will do well only in shade. Many are hardy. Protection from wind will make the foliage most beautiful. If damaged in winter, cut the foliage to the ground and a large new plant appears very quickly that same season. Bamboo wants lots of manure and compost, as well as regular watering.

Growing moss is not easy here. You need moisture, shade, infertile and compacted soil, clay being best. Moss substitutes (Irish and Scotch "moss") or even Veronica liwanensis, Veronica oltensis, or a dwarf thyme are better in sites with more sun exposure.

For plant selection, the Asian garden uses less bold color in plant material and is more foliage and texture oriented. Many shades of green. The ornamentation is often the focal point rather than the bloom. The waterfall, the granite lantern, the rustic Asian pottery, the bridge. These are the focal points and the garden is designed to showcase them.

Ornamentation

And for a finishing touch, we offer beautiful rain chains and pottery. Chinese pottery is made by classic technique, in large dragon kilns. It breathes Asia.

* for more in depth discussion of Japanese garden design, see [Creating Your Own Japanese Garden](#), Takashi Sawano or, [Japanese Garden Design](#), Marc Keane both available on Amazon.com and elsewhere



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Some of the most peaceful Asian gardens have no plants at all--the classic Zen sand garden. Raked sand and attractive stones. Others have carpets of moss. But the classic Japanese garden is going to be a little challenging in our climate. Manito Park has an excellent example, but the granite pieces are not covered in moss as they would be in the cooler, wetter climate of Japan. So, just impart an Asian style, and it will work just fine here.

Acer palmatum Japanese Maples. A host of gorgeous choices. Spectacular!

Dwarf: *Acer palmatum* 'Kamagata', A. p. 'Sharp's Pygmy', A. p. 'Shaina', A. p. 'Mikawa Yatsubusa' all these compact forms are beautiful.

Most hardy: The basic green leafed form of *Acer palmatum*. Also, A. p. 'Bloodgood', A. p. 'Inaba shidare', A. p. 'Everred'. For the toughest sites. Sun tolerant.

Least hardy: Cultivars like 'Sango kaku', 'Butterfly' and 'Bonfire' are very questionable in Spokane. Otherwise, the Japanese maples do well with afternoon shade and some wind protection.

Hakonechloa Several cultivars, including the popular *H. macra* 'Aureola'. The variegated (gold) Japanese Forest Grass is a must for the shade.

Hosta Native to Japan, Korea and parts of China. A must but not in the American style of lots of variegation. A traditional Asian garden will have these in pots (often grown in gravel) and will emphasize their use as a soothing green groundcover. Plant *H. kikutii* in a shady rock wall.

Hydrangea So many choices, including many that are very hardy and reliable here.

Paeonia The tree peony (*Paeonia suffruticosa*) is the king of flowers in China, and the herbaceous peony (*Paeonia lactiflora*) is the queen. They use these in mass. They are hardy and very long lived. Popular cultivars include 'Yao Huang', a soft yellow tree peony, 'Feng Dan Bai', a single white tree peony.

Primula Primroses are gorgeous shade plants, some blooming early before the hostas emerge. Small and cheery, use them in groups.

Rhododendron Broadleaf evergreen foliage and colorful spring display. If you have a site that is challenging, consider *Prunus l.* 'Otto Luyken' for similar foliage.

Rodgersia Several varieties, all with large, bold foliage of interesting form. Not to be missed.

Taxus A fantastic plant for hedging or evergreen structure in the shade.

Tsuga The hemlocks are but one of the many conifers that do very well in the shade. There are many colorful and interesting forms available.