



How to Create a Modern Japanese Garden

Here are basic principles in traditional Japanese pleasure gardens, such as asymmetry, concealment and borrowed views, that can be used to great effect in modern garden design. Play around with these concepts to create something exciting and contemporary. In Japanese design the hard landscaping comes first with planting added to complement the built landscape.

Strong Lines

Modern designs are often bold and punchy. Place elements of a garden at angles to each other to give the design intrigue. The notion of discovery is important in traditional Japanese garden design, where gardens were simply meant to be viewed or walked through rather than serve a practical purpose. In your design juxtapose angled pathways with planting, structures or screens to divide the garden into distinct areas and take the user on a voyage through the space.

Water

Water tends to be a dominant feature in Japanese gardens. In Japan 'stroll gardens' – gardens designed for promenading – were often created across a ravine with the focus on the journey through the space. Therefore including an element that can symbolise this is a real 'must have' in a modern Japanese garden. In our featured garden a water blade pours into a reservoir hidden in a dry bed of black pebbles. The pebble bed is bisected by the pathway, creating the illusion of a journey over water.

Materials

Textures, rocks and stones are big news in Japanese gardens. From large lumps of rock acting as bridges to pebbles that are considered and ordered, the variety of shape and texture is heightened in its simplicity. Look at combinations of rough and smooth, flat and spiky, matt and shiny. Here we used rough textured silver birch bark positioned in front of shiny black Perspex screens, using reflection and contrasting texture to create something stylish and stylised.

Planting

Planting should be simple with focus on leaf texture and form. Repeat a motif or plant choice throughout the planting scheme to create rhythm and structure. Box balls are great for this, but grasses and specimen trees work equally well. Limit the colour palette to a couple of shades and try to keep your choices subtle – the plants should blend in with the rest of the garden rather than shouting 'here I am!'



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