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Japanese garden ideas can help refresh any outside area. With spring right around the corner, now is the perfect time to get inspired by garden styles from Japan, which are among the most artistic in the world.Able to trace their roots back through the centuries, Japanese garden ideas embrace ancient traditions, reflecting a vibrant culture that still thrives today. Whether your plot is vast or cosy, Japanese garden design ideas offer ways of lifting it to an entirely new level of serenity.Here, we provide 17 of our favourite Japanese garden ideas to inspire your own landscaping project.You may like 1. Incorporate Natural Stone Into Your Design(Image credit: Getty Images)All the best Japanese garden ideas feature a generous scattering of natural stone. From minimalist zen rock gardens to giant boulders nestled among trees, including different stone types throughout your garden will give it an authentic feel straight out of Japan.Start small at first, with clearly marked areas of gravel and/or shale, which will emulate the landscape of a traditional Buddhist temple. Then, gradually, bring in bigger shapes, and add planting to bring in colour.If youre wondering how else you can use natural stone to showcase the best of your new Japanese garden, check out our smart landscaping tips.2. Find the Magic in Moss(Image credit: Getty Images)Moss is a simple yet effective groundcover plant that brings vivid verdancy to your garden without much maintenance. Many of the lush green landscapes people often associate with Japan occur because of natural moss, and leaving it to grow freely in some areas of your garden will result in a forest-like blanket reminiscent of the best Japanese garden ideas.If your garden has any moist, shady areas that could do with livening up a bit, remember that these are ideal habitats for moss.However, there are areas where this plant is perhaps less welcome. If youve laid a wooden deck recently, make sure you learn how to clean decking first, so that moss doesnt seep into the raw material; otherwise, youll be needing replacement planks or boarding before long.3. Frame Garden Views With 'Shakkei'Sofa available from Go Modern Furniture's selection of Japanese-style pieces (Image credit: Go Modern Furniture)A key concept in Japanese gardening, shakkei, which translates roughly as borrowed landscape, is vital to the composition of any outdoor space.It comprises four categories: distant borrowing (from the landscape beyond the garden), adjacent borrowing (from neighbouring features), upward borrowing (from clouds, sky, etc.), and downward borrowing (from rocks, leaves, earth and so on).Shakkei uses every direction of your gardens surrounding landscape to inform its design and enhance your gardens overall appearance.To embrace shakkei, first start thinking about the view from your garden. What lies beyond and around its immediate vicinity? If you happen to see any trees or vistas that grab your attention, frame them when incorporating your Japanese garden ideas. This can help also help your garden to feel larger (as shown above).For urban gardens without far-reaching views or those surrounded by neighbouring homes, look inwards use pergolas or structures to add privacy but that also frame the sky whilst sitting beneath them.4. Breathe New Life With Bonsai TreesFind pots and planters perfect for bonsai trees with Gardenesque (Image credit: Gardenesque)Bonsai trees hold a special place in Japanese garden ideas. Representing harmony in life and the balance of nature, most Japanese gardens are adorned with these miniature trees, which help create a zen-like ambience.Select a few bonsais for your garden, but keep in mind that they should be spaced as far apart as possible. This will help spread the tranquil effect the bonsai tree is known for, while maintaining equilibrium from end to end of your plot.Although bonsai trees are quite hardy, British winters can still do them harm not from the cold itself, which they're usually very resilient against, but through dehydration caused by the soil around their roots freezing and ceasing to function. To preserve your bonsais all year round, make sure you take them indoors ahead of any forecasted frosts.5. Create Your Own Courtyard Area(Image credit: Jeremy Phillips)There has always been an air of intimacy about Japanese gardens. Those found in tea houses were designed as retreats, far away from the hustle and bustle of daily life, while strolling gardens served as extended spaces fit for quiet contemplation. Introducing a courtyard can be a means of creatingDeveloping your own courtyard area will typically involve isolating a select portion of your outdoor space. The edge of your home may act as a natural boundary line, and perhaps consider ordering some small garden furniture, like tables, chairs, pouffes, etc., on which to rest and reflect in comfort.6. Add Bamboo for Screening and Privacy(Image credit: Getty Images)Bamboo is the quickest way to embrace Japanese garden ideas. The rustling of leaves and swaying of tall shoots make bamboo the perfect candidate for your Japanese gardening project, either as an accent plant or a privacy screen.Bamboo can actually be grown in raised beds, nowhere near your other plants, so you don't need to worry about it getting out of control. In fact, this method of cultivation also allows you to shape your bamboo.The plant can also easily be incorporated with rocks and stones to complement a traditional zen garden.7. Use Teak and Other Dark Stained WoodsDiscover quality furniture for Japanese-inspired gardens at Go Modern Furniture (Image credit: Go Modern Furniture)Dark wood commonly occurs throughout Japanese garden ideas. Going back all the way to the Classical Period, its important to note that the first Japanese landscaping efforts took place in dwellings near mountains, trees and rivers in short, places where people felt most connected to nature. As such, their aim was to beautify domestic outdoor spaces while still maintaining an overall natural aesthetic.By using teak and other dark woods in your Japanese-inspired garden, youll be highlighting its raw beauty with authentic materials. It can provide a good backdrop for planting and garden furniture too.Paint can be used to achieve this look with more inexpensive softwood. The best exterior wood paint for this job type will have a dark tone that preserves the woods original pigment as much as possible; alternatively, a strong coat of varnish can work just as well.Give your Japanese-style garden the glow it deserves with features from Sparkle Lighting (Image credit: Sparkle Lighting)Think Japanese gardens look beautiful by day? Wait until the sun goes down! In bygone centuries, braziers, candles, and even firefly nests were used as natural light sources to help illuminate outside areas. Now, though, more modern outdoor lighting solutions are available to help you achieve the same effect.Outdoor lighting for Japanese garden ideas should be spread evenly throughout the space, so everything stays well-balanced.The more environmentally conscious homeowner may also opt for garden solar lights, which do a wonderful job of mimicking the signature moonglow often associated with nights in Japan.9. Contrast Light and Dark With Your Paving(Image credit: Getty Images)Something of a yin-yang relationship, the ideal paving for Japanese garden ideas will contrast light and dark tones. This is due to the balance between forces that underpins Japanese landscape gardening as a rule.For garden paving ideas suited to Japanese gardens, make sure you alternate the contrast of your slabs between light and dark, so that each one stands on its own and yet successfully remains part of the whole. Dont worry about changing materials, though, as the effect of this disharmony is a subtle one that needs careful attention.10. A Water Feature Is a Must in a Japanese-Inspired Garden(Image credit: Getty Images)Among the most important components of any Japanese garden, water symbolises renewal, calm, and a sense of wonder at the natural world.If you think your outdoor area could use more water, and you have the space to do so, why not install a pond, or a similar large feature with a waterfall effect? This will help capture the Japanese spirit of continuity and calm exemplified by Japans rich gardening culture.A water sculpture or a small garden water feature can help achieve a similar effect in smaller gardens. The calming trickle of water can also help to drown out the sound of unwanted sounds such as traffic.11. Plant One Central Tree(Image credit: Jeremy Phillips)Trees play a huge role in not only Japanese gardens, but Japanese gardening culture as a whole, too. Whether its the humble Japanese maple or the sprawling sakura (cherry blossom), trees frame the landscape and bring the essence of nature to even the busiest places.Colour is also important trees provide a rich hue throughout the seasons in a Japanese-style garden. Acers are another popular and relatively inexpensive addition which can add colour to your garden.Making room for one central tree, like an acer or magnolia, is a low-maintenance garden idea that adds an element of focus to your space. At the same time, freeing up any remaining areas will allow you to work on them until all your Japanese garden ideas are achieved.12. Give Your Garden a Pagoda Effect(Image credit: Jeremy Phillips)No Japanese garden idea would be complete without a pagoda. A pagoda is an oriental-style pavilion, which was traditionally used as an outdoor temple.Pagodas are usually found sequestered away in a quiet corner of Japanese gardens; the perfect environment for reflection. The good news is, you dont need a secluded area to enjoy a pagoda effect outside your home.Wood trellising can be used to create a pagoda-like structure in your garden for a quintessentially Japanese feel. It will even help you to get your garden guest-ready by the time the weather warms up, because pagodas have great potential as socialising spaces, too.Other benefits of a pagoda include that it can provide shade in the summer; it helps zone your seating; and it can also add height and structure to a landscaping scheme, giving your garden a more refined appearance overall.13. Choose Low-Height FurnitureJapanese-style low furniture pieces are available at Go Modern Furniture (Image credit: Go Modern Furniture)A Japanese-inspired garden is not completewithout garden furniture that complements its intended look. For instance, you don't want a zen-like space with furniture thatlooks more at home in a cottage or country-style garden; this will only clash with the aesthetic you have carefully planned for it.Another thing to factor in is that Japanese gardens put inner calm at their heart. So, when it comes to choosing the right furniture for your Japanese garden idea, you should aim for comfortable pieces that provide anyone who visits a chance to relax and unwind in style.Low-height sofas and chairs will help your garden achieve the effect that, in turn, makes the entire outdoor area appear noticeably larger. And whether you have a large or small garden, selecting furniture that complements the space itself can open up a wealth of possibilities for how you design the rest of your new Japanese-style area.14. Introduce Japanese-Inspired PanellingGet the Japanese-inspired garden panelling you need with Stark & Greensmith LTD (Image credit: Stark & Greensmith LTD)For added privacy and sophistication, put up panelling directly inspired by Japanese gardens. Ideal for screening and delineating all manner of outdoor spaces, you can even use it as a boundary fence to establish where your sanctuary begins and ends.Screening can also be used to create sheltered spots in exposed gardens, or to help muffle traffic noise, providing a more tranquil environment for you to enjoy in peace and privacy.15. Go for a Boating Garden Aesthetic(Image credit: Jeremy Phillips)Centuries ago, Japanese boating gardens were used for recreational purposes. They often contained ponds that people rowed boats on, while also providing a safe habitat for fish like koi carp to thrive. Onshore embankments would usually run alongside the water, serving as a venue for popular forms of entertainment at the time, such as moon viewing parties or poetry recitals.Though your garden may not be big enough to accommodate a full-sized lake, that doesnt mean you cant achieve the same aesthetic as a traditional Japanese boating garden.Align your decking ideas with an elongated water feature, such as a small pond (as here) or fountain, and youll be able to achieve something of a quay effect, perfect for hosting fun outdoor gatherings of your own in the 21st century.16. Position Ornaments Throughout Your Garden SpaceBrowse for Japanese-style ornaments at Gardenesque (Image credit: Gardenesque)Ornaments are integral to all great Japanese garden design ideas. As well as bringing character, depth, and individuality, they help craft a persona for your garden.All ornamental touches throughout a Japanese garden should possess some connection to the natural world. For instance, the tsukubai, a type of stone basin typically found in Japanese tea gardens, perfectly symbolises the water element a very important part of culture in Japan.Be sure to mix and match traditional Japanese ornaments in your garden space for added authenticity.17. Highlight Your Garden's Key FeaturesLet Japanese-inspired fixtures from Sparkle Lighting bring out the beauty in your garden space (Image credit: Sparkle Lighting)Although it can seem like Japanese garden ideas are often understated, highlighting various key features can also have a positive impact on the garden's overall design. Morning or evening, giving important elements the centre stage lets your garden shine no matter what the time of day, but to do that, you'll need the right fixtures first.Paper lanterns are a fun way of showcasing the full extent of your garden's natural beauty, although they're best hung in a sheltered spot, even during spring or summer, to better withstand the unpredictable British weather.Accent lighting, highlighting a blossom tree or water feature, are perhaps more permanent garden lighting ideas that could help you achieve the Japanese-style garden look.What Are Some of the Main Japanese Garden Elements?Japanese gardens have their roots firmly (and quite literally) planted in nature, which means natural features like stone, water, trees and plants are key to creating a Japan-inspired aesthetic in your garden.Waterfall features, in particular, should be present wherever possible. A gentle trickle or low cascade can both add a tranquil mountainous ambience to your plot and provide the traditional backdrop necessary for fulfilling your Japanese garden ideas.Another thing you could do, space permitting of course, would be to embrace the full Japanese garden experience and install a bespoke koi habitat. These carp have been a fixture of many Japanese-style gardens for centuries now, with their bright colours and fluid motions.How Much Does It Cost to Build a Japanese Garden?Japanese garden ideas usually have a symbolic quality to them, which means incorporating fresh elements into your existing outdoor space for the desired effect. Costs of transforming your plot into a fully fledged Japanese-style garden will vary depending on both the garden's size and the project's scope.For instance, a common stone material like gravel is usually inexpensive (sometimes as little as 4/m2). This means that if you plan on developing a zen garden from scratch, it shouldnt blow your budget, because the elements needed to create it are relatively cost-efficient.On the other hand, water features like ponds and fountains can be pricey, especially if youre looking for traditional Japanese-style fixtures.Some exotic Japanese plants and flowers are also priced quite highly as well (anywhere between 65 and 85 for a flowering cherry tree), which is why its always prudent to have a plan for how you want your finished garden to look before embarking on such a big revamp.No matter what the scale of your Japanese garden ideas, make sure you stick to budget.Getty ImagesThe Japanese have had a tradition for creating gardens since ancient times, that capture the natural landscape. The gardens combine the basic elements of plants, water and rocks with simple, clean lines to create a spiritual haven, which in times of war and strife was the only place they found peace.Gardening expert and author of The Japanese Garden (Phaidon), Sophie Walker explains that, "the Japanese garden in its many forms is very much a space of contemplation," but that "there is always a purpose and a meaning." When making a Japanese style garden the aim should therefore be to create a mood of mystery, calm and tranquility and capture something of the essence of nature where you can restore your inner harmony.Good Housekeeping UKThe MOROTO no IE garden at Chelsea Flower Show 2024. Designed by Japanese garden designer Kazuyuki Ishihara.Below, we explain how to create your own garden at home with Japanese garden ideas and helpful advice from pro Sophie Walker.But don't worry if you don't have a lot of outdoor space, Japanese gardens can be any size as long as you keep the main concepts in mind.Sophie explains that she saw one Japanese garden just "two foot deep running along the window ledge of the first floor of a building in central Kyoto."In other words, with the principles of Japanese garden making in mind, anything is possible."How to start your Japanese garden designBefore rushing straight into your garden design, do some research and a consider what you want from your space. "Think about what you are looking for: an experience through the garden, which would involve a carefully directive path, or a garden to be looked at, perhaps through a framed view?" advises garden expert Sophie Walker. To add authenticity to a more visual garden, you could imagine it will be viewed in its entirety from the house or a timber teahouse, which is raised slightly above the ground. The idea would be to look directly onto the garden and take in the sights, scents and sounds.Tim SandallThe Green Switch garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2019 designed by Ishihara Kazuyuki. If you are looking for a garden you can experience as you move through it, you should consider winding stone paths. These paths represent the journey through life and the anticipation of whats to come. In a small garden, you could wind paths so they disappear into a shrub border to create the illusion that it takes you into a woodland glade."My practical advice as a garden designer would be to forget about pen and paper," says Sophie. "Physically lay out your plans with objects and then play until you feel its the right layout."Japanese garden plantsJapanese gardens rely on subtle differences in colour and texture.Bamboo and Conifers in soothing shades of green are planted for year-round interest and trees are pruned into shapes that reveal their architectural form. A typical feature is to have arching branches reaching over cushions of moss and groundcover, which is reflected in a pool of still water.For the Japanese, bonsai also represents a fusion of strong ancient beliefs with Eastern philosophies of the harmony between man, the soul and nature. These miniature trees are grown in ceramic containers then pruned and trained to mimic aged, mature, tall trees in nature.Azaleas, camellias and maples are used with restraint with the sole purpose of marking the changing seasons."Camellias and azaleas thrive on acid soil and flower in winter. They have wonderful deep green waxy foliage that serves as a generous backdrop shrub year round," explains Sophie.Where space is limited use single cherry tree to announce spring, a blaze of potted azaleas for early summer and the fiery foliage of a maple to mark the onset of autumn. unknownWater is a key feature and pools are crossed by a zigzag bridge, which legend says will protect you from evil spirits as they can only travel in a straight line, so the bridge traps them and allows you to escape to safety. This year silver gilt Chelsea Flower Show winner Kazuyuki Ishihara also revealed to us that Pines and Acer are also key plants to consider when designing a Japanese inspired garden. He said it's important to use typical plants that are found in the natural landscape of Japan and said this was a fundamental part in structuring his sanctuary garden. Credit: Gardening ExpressJapanese garden ornaments "No tree or stone, no object or placement is futile in the Japanese garden. Everything is orchestrated deliberately with purpose," explains gardening expert Sophie Walker. Stone lanterns, shaped as pagodas, and rain chains are staples of Japanese gardens but use them sparingly throughout the garden."Ornaments like the stone wash basin and stone lantern are used often and there is a huge variety available," says Sophie. To add a pleasant musical note to a tranquil space add a deer scarer a bamboo pipe on a pivot, which clacks as it drops down when filled with water the tone of the note depends on the size of the pipe.Of course another way to incorporate the calming effects of water into your garden, is with a pond. "A garden pond is often at the heart of a [Japanese] garden and usually contains coi carp, of which there are many for sale in UK," Sophie adds.Now 17% OffCredit: AmazonNow 12% OffCredit: AmazonHow to maintain a Japanese garden"Garden maintenance is considered a part of daily practice by Buddhist monks, particularly zen monks, for whom the raking of the gravel is important," explains expert Sophie Walker. "The care with which you tend the garden is a mind training and practice in humility."Regular trimming and tidying is a must and you could consider taking the Buddhist Zen approach.Here ferns and evergreen plants in various shades of green are key, along with silvery grey sand raked to appear like ripples of waves in pools of water. You could also achieve a similar effect with gravel and Sophie recommends a rough grey granite aggregate as it "reflects light beautifully." Standing stones are used to represent islands and mountains and the overall effect is a monochrome garden, which is conducive to meditation.Japanese garden tools When it comes to maintaining your Japanese garden, you can put away the power tools. "Good modest tools, all hand tools are used, not machines," explains Sophie. "Niwaki is the best importer of Japanese tools in the UK."All of RHS Chelsea Flower Show winners so farBy Ellie Reeves | 14th March 2025 | 5 min readJapanese gardens, also known as zen gardens, are a welcome refuge from the hustle and bustle of daily life. First created by monks in the Muromachi period, they were built besides temples as a place to reflect on the Buddhas teachings. Nowadays, theyre celebrated all over the world for their serenity and elegance. Looking for more ways to connect with nature, reduce stress, and find a sense of balance in your life? Weve taken some inspiration from traditional zen gardens to help you design your own Japanese-inspired patch of tranquility. In traditional Japanese gardens, raking gravel is a meditative act which helps to improve mental clarity and focus. Carefully place rocks of different sizes on a patch of gravel or sand and use a rake to create patterns. One of the most common methods is the water drop pattern. To recreate it yourself, place a rock in the middle of some sand or gravel and create a circle pattern radiating from the rock with your rake. Not only is this a therapeutic practice, but it will also create a beautiful effect in your mini zen garden. Experiment with different patterns, be as creative as you like, and most of all, enjoy the process. No zen garden is complete without water in some form, whether thats a trickling water feature or a glistening koi pond. The sound of flowing water instantly soothes and calms the mind. Create a wonderful oasis in your outdoor space with one of our calming garden water features or fountains. If youre thinking of adding a pond to your garden, check our helpful DIY guide and discover everything you need to know about designing and creating a pond. Nature has everything you need for a relaxing space; swaying grasses, subtle scents and colours that can calm or lift your mood. Think blues, pinks, and greens for your colour palette. These gorgeous plants will look glorious in your zen garden Clematis Alpines Dicentra spectabilis Stipa Scabiosa Wisteria sinensis Bacopa Senecio Delphinium Our gardens are our safe space from the big and scary world out there. Create a comfortable sitting area where you can escape from your hectic schedule and simply sit, reflect, and be still for a moment. Whether its a wooden arbour, pergola, or gazebo create an attractive al fresco seating area to unwind in. Add outdoor cushions, blankets, and Japanese style ornaments to make the space even more cosy and inviting. Japanese gardens typically have a central feature which draws the eye in. Use a garden ornament, such as a sculpture or statue, to create a beautiful focal point in your garden. You could bring a spiritual dimension to the garden with a Buddha statue. When it comes to choosing ornaments for your zen garden, keep it simple. The Japanese aesthetic is all about minimalism, so select pieces that are simple and understated. Also, when choosing where to place your ornament, consider the overall design of the garden and how different elements will interact with each other. Caring for and tending to nature is another mindful activity which can promote focus and clarity. With their vibrant foliage and graceful shapes,Japanese maple trees(otherwise known as acers) bring colour and beauty with them wherever they go. Planting a tree in your garden is a wonderful way to connect with the natural world. From planting to pruning, each stage in the tree lifecycle will cultivate a sense of purpose. If youve got a lot on your mind, sometimes theres nothing better than going for a stroll and reflecting on your worries or doubts. Add some curving paths using gravel or stepping stones to create a garden walkway. You can make your path as long or short as you like, it could wind through foliage and trees, or it could meander around a pond or other feature. Japanese stroll gardens allow you to slow down and appreciate the beauty of nature. Carve out a dedicated space for meditating. It could be a patch on the grass or a spot on your patio or decking. Meditation is a powerful tool for focusing on the present and gaining a new perspective. Just ten mindful minutes a day can have a huge impact on your wellbeing and quality of life. Meditating in nature, surrounded by the whistling trees and tweeting birds, will help to soothe your mind for an even deeper practice.Weve loved Japanese gardens since 1910, when the Japan-British exhibition brought eight million people to London to thrill at show gardens of miniature Mount Fujis and blazing acer, or maple, trees. In the subsequent craze for Japanese gardens, the English aristocracy shipped boulders, trees and entire buildings from the Far East to fill their acres with tea houses, ornamental bridges and impeccably raked gravel. More than a hundred years on, Japanese gardens continue to enthral us and have never felt more contemporary. Often featuring a simple palette of peaceful greens, rocks, gravel and water with meandering paths and secluded spaces to sit quietly, they are places for calm and contemplation, and an escape from the stresses of modern life.Here are a few easy Japanese garden ideas to help you create your own Zen masterpiece.In the West, we tend to pack our gardens with plants in every corner, but Japanese gardens see the beauty in restraint. Less is most definitely more. For an easy Japanese garden idea, planting a single potted maple 'Sango-kaku' in full autumn finery, underplanted by Japanese forest grass or placed in an area of gravel makes all the impact you'll need. Allow space around specimen shrubs and trees to show off their natural form.RHS/Tim SandallO-mo-te-na-shi no NIWA - The Hospitality Garden designed by Kazuyuki Ishihara at the Chelsea Flower Show 2018, demonstrates traditional Japanese garden designClip topA backdrop of evergreens creates a calm atmosphere year-round. Skimmia, hebes, Japanese holly (Ilex crenata), yew and Pittosporum tenuifolium 'Golf Ball' are all ideal candidates and can be clipped neatly to create strong shapes. Niwaki hand tools are so beautiful that youll be searching for something to clip the minute you unwrap them. Cloud-pruned trees, show poodles in tree form, are showstoppers that take many years to train and are expensive as a result. Dwarf pine trees (Pinus sylvestris 'Watereri' and Pinus mugo, try paramountplants.co.uk) are much cheaper and can be highly sculptural if you lift the canopy by pruning off the bottom branches.RHS/Sarah CuttleKampo no Niha, by Kazuto Kashiwakura and Miki Sato for the Chelsea Flower Show 2019, was designed for a practitioner of Kampo, a system of Japanese herbal medicineAll the greensBamboo creates instant atmosphere against a fence, and yellow-and black-stemmed varieties (Phyllostachys aurea and nigra) won't spread madly either. As for ground cover greens to plant under trees or shrubs, try the waving emerald Japanese forest grass or, for amore formal look, Pachysandra terminalis.For instant impact, planting hostas and ferns are great Japanese garden ideas for your own outdoor space. Hostas look lush if you can keep the slugs off them, and ferns, with their elegant unfurling fronds, are a must. The hard fern (Blechnum spicant), common polypody (Polypodium vulgare) and stunning silvery Japanese painted fern (Athyrium niponicum) will strike the right note.Zen Rial//Getty ImagesBamboo is an easy and budget- friendly way of setting the tone in your Japanese-style garden, but it can be invasive if you go for a type that spreads, be sure to plant it in a containerFlashes of colourFlowers, when they do feature in Japanese gardens, are often transient and all the more beautiful for it, with bursts of bold colours set against the backdrop of verdant greens. Don't overdo it though, just one or two flowering shrubs will do the job. It may be a cherry tree in blossom or an azalea, camellia or rhododendron (go for compact Rhododendron yakushimanum for smaller gardens) in bloom. In autumn, when the Japanese maple leaves turn, expect foliage fireworks from red to orange and butter yellow. Particularly beautiful varieties include Acer palmatum 'Bloodgood' and 'Sango-kaku', which adds bright red stems to its repertoire of fiery autumn leaves, so it looks stunning even when the branches are bare.JennyRainbow//Getty ImagesPrunus mume Beni-chidori or Japanese apricot is a small deciduous tree that flowers in late-winter or early spring, and produces beautiful deep pink bloomsmtreasure//Getty ImagesIn autumn, Japanese maples burst into firework hues; the leaves on this Acer palmatum Bloodgood turn a spectacular redMake the most of mossJapanese gardens celebrate moss and the soft, aged quality it brings. If you see moss growing on the risers of garden steps, in walls or the cracks in paving, leave it to do its thing. When planting in large pots, place cushion bun moss on the surface of the compost to make a beautiful understorey to acer trees. On a larger scale, ground cover plant, mind-your-own-business, will quickly soften the edges of paving stones to create a more natural look.PhotoAlto/Michele Constantini//Getty ImagesMind-your-own-business can soften the edges of concrete stepping stones to give them a more natural lookScreen in styleBamboo and reed screening, available from most garden centres, will set the tone and are easy to roll out and attach to your existing fence with cable ties or wire. For a more permanent solution, if budget allows, blackened timber fencing, the modern application of the ancient Japanese art of Shou Sugi Ban, makes a dramatic backdrop (try shousugiban.co.uk).Water all aroundA Japanese-style garden will almost always contain water, whether it's a still pond filled with koi carp and water lilies or a small trickling fountain. If you have limited space, a stone trough left to develop lichen and moss, or a simple rusted metal water bowl may be all the water you need. If you want to turn it into a simple water feature, place a pump inside (available from any garden centre) so the water can trickle down into the trough.blew_i//Getty ImagesFrom trickling fountains to simple troughs, water is an important element in Japanese gardensBe bold with bouldersJapanese gardens commonly include large stones often draped with moss or placed in raked gravel. In the Zen Buddhist tradition, in which gardens represent the natural world in a highly stylised way, large stones represent mountains and gravel the sea. Pale grey gravel in secluded seating areas and irregular shaped stepping stones on paths set a Japanese tone to the hard landscaping. See cedstone.co.uk for a selection of natural boulders and stepping stones that will look as though they have been there forever.Credit: Thompson & MorganCredit: Thompson & MorganCredit: Thompson & MorganNow 67% OffCredit: CrocusNow 17% OffCredit: CrocusCredit: Thompson & MorganCredit: Thompson & Morgan3 Japanese gardens you can visit Kyoto Garden Holland Park, LondonTiered waterfalls, a serene pond of koi carp, and peacocks too (visit parkgrandkensington.co.uk).ablokhin//Getty ImagesKyoto Garden Holland Park, London Tatton Park, CheshireOne of the finest Japanese gardens in Europe, it includes a Shinto shrine, a miniature Mount Fuji with a 'snowy' top of white stones and authentic artefacts (visit tattonpark.org.uk). Japanese Garden, CornwallRaked gravel and boulders, acers, azaleas and a serene tea house await in this one-acre plot that was built as a meditative garden. A specialist Bonsai and Japanese nursery is next door so you can stock up if youve been inspired (visit japanesegarden.co.uk).Like this article? Sign up to our newsletter to get more articles like this delivered straight to your inbox.SIGN UPIn need of some positivity or not able to make it to the shops? Subscribe to House Beautiful magazine today and get each issue delivered directly to your door. Natalie AshbeeWriter & EditorA sea of greens, mosses rolling over ancient boulders, stone bridges and tranquil tea houses transport us to Japan and a culture filled with beauty and meaning. Discover Japanese-style gardens and how to recreate them at homeIf you crave a garden that brings a sense of peace and calm, with intricate details, shapely plants and soothing water features, seeking inspiration in Japanese gardens could be just what you need to transform your dull space into a world of wonder.Britainslove affair with Japanese gardening styles began in the late 19th Century, when British gardeners were moving away from highly formal gardening styles and seeking new sources of inspiration. After Japan opened its borders for trade in the 1850s, after centuries of isolationism, many people in Britain were exposed to Japanese culture for the first time. The 1910Japan-British Exhibitionin Londoncaused quite a stir amongst wealthy gardeners. Visitors encountered plants and features they had not seen before, including tea houses, stone lanterns, andthe art of bonsai(which originatedin China).This style of garden has been loved by British gardeners for decades and is celebrated every year at the RHS Flower Shows when we see garden designers such as Kazuyuki Ishiharabring a perfectly proportioned slice of Japan to our shores. Createa Japanese-style garden at home In Japan, traditional gardens are expressions of religious and philosophical thought, with each element carefully chosen and rich with meaning. Understanding this complexity is key as you choose which elements to emulate in your own space. Below are a few possible elements you might like to consider, but there are many more besides as Japanese gardens are wonderfully varied. You dont need to include them all. Pick the ones that suit the size of your garden and your budget. You could even create this look on a balcony using the same design ideas. Naturalistic elements Use interesting rocks to represent mountains, sitting these into either groundcover planting or gravel to make it feel natural.Try and keep the plantsin proportion to the size of your stones to give an authentic look. Moss and lichensadd to the feel of an ancient landscape and anchor the stones in the space. This is designed to create a miniature, idealised version of nature. Water features Water is a key element in Japanese style and can be as simple as a water bowl (also providing for wildlife). Larger features such as a waterfall take time and effort to create and if you are unsure, consult a water garden expert. Many traditional Japanese gardens also use rocks, stonesand pebbles to create drywaterfalls or streams without any water. Organic shapes Naturalistic style alsoapplies to the shapes used in garden design, in paths andplanting areas, and to theplants themselves, which are clipped into organic forms. This mostly suits shrubs and especially evergreens, with cloud pruning a popular form of topiary. Rounded boulders are often used in steps and edges, and water features have curved rather than straight edges. Japanese gardens embrace asymmetric but balanced design. Minimalistic design The combination of many of these elements forms a minimalistic design but each one has its place and its importance. Japanese style embraces a perfectionist aesthetic with each plant, structure and shape being chosen for its form. Paths and bridges The journey around yourgarden is importantin Japanese garden design. Paths, bridges and stepping stones are intentionally designed to influence how you progressthrough the space and control views of the garden. They allow you time to take in other elements of the garden, spaces to stop and observe something beautifula plant or the sound of water.Stepping stones are carefully positioned at adistance to slow your movement down, takingcare to reach each step rather than by using a straight path that you dash along. They are usually made of natural materials such as wood or stone and often pass close to or around water and plants, sometimes with obstacles, all intended to slow you down.Miegakure is the Japanese term for hide and reveal, which is another way to control views of the garden. Stone lanterns Lanterns carved from stone originated in China, and in Japan were mainly used in Buddhist temples to light paths, before being used as lighting in gardens. They are made up of sections, which are said to represent the five elements of Buddhist cosmology earth, water, fire, wind, and void. In British gardens these are usually used as ornamental sculptures and give the space a strong focal point. Read more about the history of the Stone Lantern Tea houses Japanese tea rooms were specifically built forthe ceremony of sharing tea but are beautiful buildings in themselves, often made from wood and bamboo. They are a simple design with clean lines, muted coloursinside and intricate ornaments to look at. How you decorate your own tea house is purely personal but aim for a calming, restful space where you can see out into the garden and observe nature. The tea ceremony is usually conducted while sitting on the floor, but you might want to include some simple seating in your own version. Read more about the Japanese tea ceremony Raked gravel Beauty and simplicity combine in the traditional Zen or Dry Garden, usually an open space which combines meticulously positioned rocks, minimalist planting, and intricately raked gravel representing water, moved into swirls and curves, like ripples or waves that are designed to enhance a meditative state. They are both beautiful to look atand calming to tend. If you have young children or pets, this might not suit! Read more aboutJapanese Zen Gardens Restrained but beautiful planting As with any garden design,plants are the jewels in the crown, and we arelucky to have a wealthof well-stocked plant nurseries across the UK. Many of the plants that grow in Japan suit our climate well, which is why many of our oldest gardens have large and ancient specimens that have grown successfully here. Many ofour most popular plants originate from Japan, such as camellias, magnolias, rhododendrons, Japanese anemones, Japanese acers, hostas and bamboos. Did you know you can borrow books from the RHS Library? Find out more Japanese garden design at theRHS All five of theRHS Gardens around the UK have areas that are inspired by Japanese design, including the Rock Garden at RHS Wisley in Surrey and the Sandstone Rock Garden at RHS Harlow Carrin Harrogate. You can also find inspirational garden styles from around the world, including Japan, at the RHS Shows. At RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2025 discover these inspirational gardens: There are also over 230 RHS Partner Gardens across the UK, some of which also feature Japanese garden features:The Royal Horticultural Society is the UKs leading gardening charity. We aim to enrich everyones life through plants, and make the UK a greener and more beautiful place. We pick some of the key plants to grow in a Japanese garden, below.Hakonechloa macraJapanese forest grass, Hakonechloa macra, is a gorgeous shade-loving grass that will gently rustle as it catches a breeze. Plant it in swathes or bold clumps to soften the hard edges of paths and steps.Cydonia oblongaQuince (Cydonia oblonga) makes a beautiful addition to low-maintenance Japanese garden planting schemes. In spring it produces cup-shaped flowers, followed by golden fruits in autumn. Quince can also be trained as a deciduous bonsai tree.Azalea 'Rosebud'Clipped into neat mounds or domes, azaleas and rhododendrons are bedecked in dazzling flowers come spring. They need neutral to acidic soil to thrive, however, so grow in pots of peat-free ericaceous compost if you have alkaline soil.Araiostegia parvipinnataThis beautiful fern and other species in the genus are known as hare's foot ferns, which spread by creeping rhizomes. Intersperse with ground cover moss or hakonechloa. Araiostegia parvipinnata needs a moist, shady spot.Prunus 'Pink Shell'This list wouldn't be complete without mention of ornamental cherry trees, or sakura. Japan is renowned for its spectacular cherry blossom festivals in March and April. Lots of cherry species can be used for sakura, including Prunus x yedoensis, Prunus serrulata and Prunus padus.Acer palmatum 'Sango-kaku'Japanese maples are Japanese shrubs or trees and come in a huge variety of leaf colours and shapes, all of them gorgeous in autumn. Underplant with clipped, rounded shrubs or hakonechloa.Wisteria floribunda 'Multijuga'Japanese wisteria, Wisteria floribunda, works well in many settings, but in Japanese gardens it's often grown over large arbours and arches. Walking beneath these structures is the perfect way to enjoy the scent of the pendulous flowers. Prune twice a year, in summer and winter, to get the best flower displays.How to prune wisteria in summerHow to prune wisteria in winterTree peony 'Shimane-sedai'Showy, ornamental flowers like peonies and chrysanthemums are great for bringing splashes of colour to Japanese gardens. Pink varieties of Paeonia suffruticosa (pictured) and Paeonia lactiflora are particularly popular.Pinus thunbergii 'Thunderhead'Black or Japanese pines, Pinus thunbergii, are a useful source of evergreen colour. They're often 'cloud pruned' - a technique that involves shaping the crown into soft, cloud-like forms. As old needles are dropped they help to acidify the soil below - particularly beneficial to azaleas and rhododendrons planted directly beneath.Styrax japonicusStyrax species like Styrax japonicus (pictured) and Styrax obassia are Japanese shrubs with white, bell-shaped flowers appearing in the summer months. They look beautiful planted next to water or paths.Water can be used in even the smallest of gardens, adding to the ambience through trickling sounds and pretty reflections. Ponds can be planted with waterlilies and Japanese flag irises,Iris ensata. For smaller gardens, consider garden water bowls or trickling water features.

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