

Japanese Gardens Today: Audience

If the public Japanese garden is to survive, let alone thrive, it must have an audience and must continually expand it. Japanese gardens are not alone in this need; museums, theaters, opera companies and other art forms must do the same. Even if a garden is not dependent on admission fees for its income, the primary supporters typically provide funding based on the value they perceive the garden to have for some constituency – whether students at a university, taxpaying citizens, tourists visiting a municipality, or patrons of a botanical garden.

As society changes, so do people's interests and options for use of their leisure time. A Japanese garden's competition for the attention of potential visitors/users is rarely another Japanese garden. It is far more likely to be a shopping mall, Facebook, or television.

So who are the audiences for Japanese gardens? And how can they be attracted?

- **Japanese garden lovers:** the easiest audience to attract because they will seek out a Japanese garden wherever they live or travel. Making sure your garden is included in travel guides of all sorts and in all media is usually sufficient for the Japanese garden lover to find you.
- **DIYers:** Do-it-yourselfers in various fields related to Japanese gardens. These folks may want to build their own Japanese garden in their backyard, tend bonsai or raise *koi*. They will probably seek you out the first time, but need workshops or classes, advice and guidance to get them to return.
- **Japanophiles:** literally, people who love Japan. Japanophiles may include people of Japanese descent as well as people of other backgrounds who have an interest in Japanese culture. They range from former U.S. military people who were stationed in Japan to teenagers fascinated with *anime*. These people will also seek you out, but will likely need a variety of cultural programming to keep them coming back.
- **People dealing** with cancer, depression, or other diseases – and their families. A Japanese garden can be an escape that provides solace and can often help in the healing process. Several of the most generous donors to the Morikami's garden literally came to me unsolicited out of gratitude for the peace of mind the garden helped them attain while battling cancer.



- **Tourists:** With ever-expanding mobility, there are few communities anywhere that do not seek to attract tourists. Japanese gardens attract tourists because of their uniqueness, beauty, special historical context, etc. Tourists tend to pay admission fees, buy in garden stores, patronize other concessions, and generally leave money behind. Position your garden as a must-see with your local Convention & Visitors Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, AAA, AARP, online search engines, and area hotels.
- **Multicultural communities and families:** In the not so distant past, the audience for Japanese gardens was mostly Japanese immigrants and their families, and affluent white people. Today you often can't tell the multiethnic, multiracial, multicultural mix of people who may make up your audience. I know families whose backgrounds are Japanese and white European; Japanese and Chinese; African-American and white European; Japanese and African-American; Japanese, white European and African-American; Japanese and Brazilian; white Cuban and Chinese, etc. And we can add the 'pure' Mexican, Guatemalan, Colombian, Haitian, African-American, Filipino and other individuals who visit. It may be that people of the non-dominant racial and ethnic background have a special appreciation for the culture of others, or simply that the beauty of a Japanese garden appeals to everyone. Whatever the reason, don't ignore PR or advertising in non-English language media and make sure your customer service staff are trained to be welcoming to people of all races and ethnicities.
- **Peace and beauty lovers:** who doesn't need a little more peace and beauty in their lives these days? Almost everyone today runs at a fast pace. Multi-tasking is seen as an essential skill. Japanese gardens encourage us to slow down, take a deep breath, feel the breeze on our faces, pay attention to the world around us, and appreciate the beauty of nature. Virtually everyone fits into this category – whether they know it or not. You may not be able to convince someone that they need to visit your Japanese garden, but you can make them want to find you when they need some peace and beauty in their lives.

Japanese gardens today enjoy wonderful opportunities to make a real difference in the lives of many different kinds of audiences.