

Japanese-style Planting

The British have had a fascination with things oriental for centuries and because of the range wonderful plants that have been introduced from Japan and China, it's straightforward to introduce a Japanese feel to an area of the garden whether on the largest or smallest of scales. Below we've described some of the plants we love to put together to create this special effect. A collection of tubs on a patio or balcony can be given a Japanese feel by choosing a beautifully-shaped Japanese Acer, a dwarf conifer, maybe a young Japanese Umbrella Pine and a Prunus 'Kojo-no-Mai' and then adding a Wisteria trained as a roof or umbrella to provide dappled shade. Japanese gardening is restrained, so less can be more.

Evergreen Trees

Sciadopitys verticillata – the Japanese Umbrella Pine is a slow-growing and botanically unique conifer – its whorls of 'leaves' are in fact made of stem tissue. It needs rich, moist, acid to neutral to soil. We're very enthusiastic about it and offer both large and small specimens.

A range of dwarf and small conifers lend themselves well to Japanese-style gardens – we particularly love *Pinus mugo* 'Humpy' and *Pinus sylvestris* 'Andorra'. Another suitable pine is *Pinus sylvestris* 'Globosa', a naturally mop-headed variety of the native Scots Pine which we offer grafted as quarter and half standards.

Deciduous Trees

The Japanese Acers are essential to any Japanese-style planting. We love them and incorporate them when we can into any planting. Particular favourites are *Acer shirasawanum* 'Aureum' for its upright, layered habit and striking leaves, *A. palmatum dissectum viridis* which boasts a mound-forming mushroom shape and *A. palmatum* 'Sangukaku' for its coral stems, which are unbeatable for winter interest.

Cercidiphyllum japonicum – the Katsura Tree, which often gives its best autumn colour on acid soils, puts on a spectacular display of yellows and purples in autumn. The fallen leaves smell of burnt sugar.

Ginkgo biloba – the Maidenhair Tree, like the Japanese Umbrella Pine, is a living fossil and the sole survivor of its once numerous family of trees. A deciduous conifer its unusual, mid-green leaves turn glorious buttery-yellow in autumn. It grows large, so plant with discretion.

No Japanese-style garden would be complete without a Flowering Cherry. For smaller gardens we like the upright *Prunus* 'Amanogawa' and for larger spaces *Prunus* 'Kanzan' and the white-flowering tree *Prunus serrula*. For the smallest gardens of all, nothing can beat the weeping *Prunus incisa* 'Snow Showers' or a half-standard *Prunus* 'Kojo-no-mai' with its single, white flowers – the name translates as 'Flight of Butterflies' – need we say more?

Sorbus 'Eastern Promise' – a pink-berried Rowan whose green leaves turn purple then fiery red in autumn

Sophora japonica 'Pendula' – the Pagoda Tree may take a good many years to start producing its long, creamy-white flower panicles, but its gnarled habit makes it a worthy addition to any Japanese-style planting

Styrax fargesii – the Snowbell Tree is best grown on a bank so it can show off its fragrant, bell-shaped, white flowers to best advantage. Needs neutral to acid soil.

Evergreen Shrubs

Camellia japonica – the glossy, dark leaves of the Camellia make an excellent evergreen background to other plants all year, and enjoys a few weeks of glory in the spring when it produces its flowers.

Camellia sasquana – the autumn-flowering Camellia may produce a smaller, less showy flower than the spring-flowering variety, but it makes up for this in the abundance of its flowering at a time of year when flowering shrubs are in short supply, and the reduction in risk of frost damage

Pieris japonica – amongst the large Pieris we like *P. 'Mountain Fire'*, with its brilliant red young foliage, but our real favourite is *P. 'Debutante'*, which makes a compact bush growing to 1m plus, producing its white flowers over a long period

Rhododendrons and *Azaleas* – acid-loving shrubs from the mountains of Japan and the Himalaya – choose a plant of the right size to suit your Japanese-style planting as some Rhododendrons eventually grow very large

Deciduous Shrubs

Hamamelis x intermedia 'Diane' and *Hamamelis x intermedia 'Pallida'* – the Witch Hazels – are plants with a long period of interest, flowering on bare stems over winter and in autumn vivid reds and yellows appearing together on the large leaves before leaf-fall.

Topiary and Bonsai

Ilex crenata 'Kinme' grown as a Cloud Tree – the classical evergreen Cloud Tree is a real work of horticultural and sculptural art – worth every penny of its inevitably high price

Larix kaempferi grown as a Cloud Tree – like the Ginkgo biloba, this is not a tree for a small Japanese-style garden, but in the right place it looks wonderful

Climbers

Wisteria sinensis (the Chinese Wisteria) and *Wisteria floribunda* (the Japanese Wisteria) – for us are the jewels of the botanical world – easy to grow, extremely long-lived, vigorous and magnificent when in flower. In late spring all varieties produce colourful cascades of fragrant flowers in whites, pinks and blues. We adore *W. floribunda 'Black Dragon'* with its intensely dark flowers and the white-flowered *W. floribunda 'Shiro-kapitan Fuji'* with its long, generous racemes. During the winter the form of their twining stems, which becomes increasingly gnarled with age adds character to the Japanese-style garden

Bamboos

x Hibanobambusa tranquillans 'Shiroshima' is a large, evergreen bamboo with cream variegation along the leaf margins

We particularly love the Phyllostachys family of bamboos – they are tall, clumping bamboos and are evergreen so they make great screening and offer a range of stem colours. Grown in full sun, *P. aurea* has golden stems. *P. bissetii* grows fast and is excellent for screening; its stems are shiny green, aging to yellowish green. *P. nigra* is the black-stemmed bamboo and *P. vivax 'Aureocaulis'* is the largest of the bunch, growing to over 12m tall at maturity in favourable conditions. There are intermittent green vertical lines on its yellow stems.