



JAPAN INFORMATION
AND CULTURE CENTER
在米国日本大使館広報文化センター

TEACHING TUESDAY

KARESANSUI

The term karesansui (枯山水 “dry landscape”) is often translated into English as a “Japanese rock garden” or a “zen garden”. Rock gardens are typically very small, as they represent a miniature stylized landscape, composed of arrangements of rocks, water features, moss, trees and bushes. These arrangements are surrounded by gravel or sand raked to represent ripples in water. The Japanese aesthetic underlying these gardens is yohaku-no-bi, literally “the beauty of blank space.”

The modern form of a classical rock garden was born in Kyoto during the Muromachi Period, although they were mentioned as far back as the Heian Period (784-1185). When Zen Buddhism was introduced in the late 12th century, the use of zen gardens became widespread as monks designed and used them for contemplation. The care of the garden also became part of the monk’s practice. Often, but not always, these gardens are designed to be viewed from a single, seated perspective. Originally made of only rocks and gravel, plants and moss have been introduced to the garden structure since the early Edo Period. Strict rules also exist for the arrangement of rocks, such as more horizontal than vertical rocks.

The style of rock gardens are planned and sculpted to reflect the architecture around it. Buildings, terraces, other structures may be represented by the positioning of items in the garden. Recently, rock gardens have become popular with people around the world as great ways to use small spaces for aesthetic and spiritual appeal.