



# Asian Gardens for Your Home

By Calen Rayne

A Japanese or Chinese rock garden is an excellent way to interpret aspects of the natural world right in your own back yard. Some landscape professionals are now incorporating these Asian gardens as part of their designs to enhance areas of a property where traditional treatments are not viable. These designs are often inspired by the more famous gardens of Japan and China, as well as miniature presentations that might mirror bonsai and penjing traditions normally found in interior of homes.

The oldest known description of purely stone gardens is found in the *Sakuteiki*, or *Records of Garden Making*, written in the late Heian period (11th century). It reads, “A garden of arranged stones that has neither a pond nor a stream shall be called a dry landscape garden, one that expresses a water-filled natural landscape without the actual

presence of water.” Other variations, including the Japanese *ishi* gardens, might include flowers, ornamental shrubs, and blue stones that represent water features.

Creating an Asian stone garden is ideal for any space. Even a small piece of land along an alleyway can be transformed into a small courtyard garden. They are ideal for small spaces near parking or driveways, a way for visitors to feel welcome when they arrive. To the viewer, Eastern gardens appear tranquil, natural, and simple.

Stones provide the foundation and heart of the entire design. Think of stone as reflective of mountains in the landscape. It is best to incorporate stone in natural, uncut forms in these landscapes. Rocks of various shapes and size are one of the foundational elements of an Asian garden. Both Chinese and Japanese landscape designers have used them to

establish a solid base for their designs. Eastern gardens often appear to have stones randomly placed in their configuration to reflect a more naturally occurring situation, as if they'd always been there.

Water is another basic components and from still ponds to flowing streams and even small cascades, you can incorporate any feature that you feel is best for your garden. If the garden happens to be in a dry climate where water is not easily kept, pools or streams of gravel can be installed to reflect the element of water even though it is not available. Consider Mexican beach stones or other stones blue in color to simulate your water features. Water and stone are the ying-yang of garden and your design should have them complement each other. Both sand and small river pebbles are often used as a base.

When it comes to flowers or ornamental shrubs, they are not out of the question. It's just important to recognize their role in the garden to bring out the energy of stones. Flowers can be colorful, but not so colorful as to be distracting. Japanese tradition calls for colorful flowers to work with shrubs, usually green, to balance your garden design. Garden arrangement is going to be key. Every seemingly insignificant detail is a symbol, and every element of a garden serves a purpose.

Keeping your design simple and small actually works best towards a successful final product and space. Begin with an edging material of some sort to define shape of garden. Lay down landscape cloth to prevent growth of weeds. Lay a base of small stones and set your larger stones. Choose stones that play off each other's shape and energy. Then add flowers and ornamental shrubs. If using Mexican beach stone to represent water, decide on a small pool or flowing river appearance. Certain stones enable one to mimic a waterfall.

Your garden should not only reflect nature but also interpret it. Its essential principles focus on balance and harmony. A garden that is crafted with simplicity of design in mind is going



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to allow a mind to unclutter itself. Pause and reflect on your perceived design and look at the designs that others have done. Asian gardens are built on an expectation of calm and inspiration. Have some idea of what speaks to you before you break ground.

Stone gardens have experienced a boom in popularity outside Japan and China. With a bit of time and planning, making your own stone garden is not an impossible task. Find a place on your property that may not lend itself to traditional landscape components and create a pleasant place where you and your family and friends can take a moment to rest from the busyness of modern life and calm your soul. Don't worry about breaking any rules, when it comes to designing your own rock garden, there are none. These gardens can represent whatever brings you joy in the moment, and over time, you can experiment with your original design elements so they continue to speak to you year after year.

Asheville is fortunate to have a wonderful collection of bonsai at the North Carolina Arboretum. <https://www.ncarboretum.org/plan-a-visit/garden-exhibits/bonsai-exhibition-garden/>. Make plans to attend the Carolina Bonsai Expo On October 13-14, 2018 to attend workshops and gather ideas for your own landscape designs.

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