

**Learning to Live in  
Harmony with Nature**

Teacher Overview

Portland Japanese Garden  
Lesson Plans for the Classroom



*Four Seasons ♦ Five Senses ♦ One Extraordinary Experience*

Dear Educator,

Step into the Portland Japanese Garden and discover a world of new ideas and experiences that will bring your classroom to life! We invite you to explore this world with your students on a class visit to the Garden and through the *Learning to Live in Harmony with Nature* teaching materials you will find enclosed.

With the Portland Japanese Garden as a living vehicle for exploration, you and your students are invited to discover new ways of thinking, not only about Japanese culture, but about natural science, language arts, social studies, and the visual arts.

*Learning to Live in Harmony with Nature* includes five lesson plans that serve Oregon State Common Curriculum Goals in several categories, while offering a variety of approaches to engage children in learning to understand and appreciate nature through the Garden.

Each of the five lesson plans in this packet is designed to enhance a field trip to the Garden, but can also be used in the classroom by taking advantage of the natural spaces around your school, in a park or on a trail nearby.

Each lesson designates the grade-level for which it is written (K-2, 3-5, and 6-8), but each also includes easy-to-use methods of adapting the plans to fit whichever grade level you teach.

The *Learning to Live in Harmony with Nature* packet includes:

Teacher's Overview

Lesson One: *Kodomo no Hi*: Children's Day in Japan (Levels 3-5) with "How-To" PowerPoint

Lesson Two: Garden Sense: Exploring the Five Senses (Levels K-2)

Lesson Three: *Haiku*: Poetry in the Garden (Levels 3-5)

Lesson Four: *Mitate*: To See with New Eyes (Levels 6-8)

Lesson Five: Stones: The Bones of the Garden

Virtual Tour of the Garden

Each lesson plan includes: Objectives, Common Curriculum Goals, Materials List, Classroom Activities (with step-by-step instructions), and Suggested Resources (with worksheets and rubrics included in some lessons).

The Garden also offers a Virtual Tour with beautiful images of the Portland Japanese Garden in a PowerPoint presentation, which can be downloaded to create OHP transparencies or hard copies for classroom use.

We hope these materials will help you to incorporate the topic of Japanese culture into your busy curriculum. For more information about the Portland Japanese Garden or to schedule a school tour online please visit our website at [www.japanesegarden.com/visiting](http://www.japanesegarden.com/visiting) or email us at [tours@japanesegarden.com](mailto:tours@japanesegarden.com). Please ask about special funds available for transportation and admissions for Title I qualified schools.

I look forward to seeing you in the Garden!

Diane Durston  
Curator of Culture, Art and Education

### Japanese Culture Responds to Nature's Diversity

Japan is a nation comprised of more than two thousand islands of spectacular natural beauty. Japan's land is rugged and wild, with jagged mountains and steep, forested hills. Formed by volcanic action, the islands consist predominately of numerous crests of mountains arisen from the sea that run like a backbone down the length of the archipelago, separating the Pacific side from the Sea of Japan side. Stretching for 3000 miles (1800 km), the topography of the islands includes rocky coastal areas, flat plains, deep valleys, lush green mountains, and rushing rivers. Living in harmony with the complexity, diversity, and demands of nature is at the heart of Japanese culture.

On mountainous islands, three-quarters of which are unsuitable for agriculture or residential use, the Japanese people have long responded and adapted to the geographic demands of the coastal areas. The Japanese are accustomed to coping with typhoons and heavy rains annually. Located in the Pacific Ring of Fire, at the juncture of at least three tectonic plates, the Japanese have historically been affected by the high geologic instability beneath the islands. Frequent low-intensity tremors result in over 1000 minor earthquakes annually and highlight nature's below-the-surface volatility. Occasional volcanic activity and turbulent earthquakes, often resulting in tsunamis, have habitually occurred several times each century and caused destruction within the very fabric of Japanese life.



While this curriculum was being written, Japan was hit by one of the largest earthquakes ever recorded. The March 11, 2011 quake, measuring at 9.0 magnitude, spawned a deadly tsunami that slammed into the nation's east coast of northern Honshu. Together, these natural events have left an inconceivable swath of devastation in their wake. In the face of nature's upheavals, the Japanese repeatedly demonstrate their strength, resilience, and adaptability to their uncertain environment.

In Japanese culture, living in nature is far more than a physical relationship; it is a relationship based in understanding and adjustment, cooperation and compromise. The temperate climate of most of the country experiences four distinct changes of the seasons that have long been reflected in Japanese art, poetry, food, architecture, and garden design alongside festivals and activities. To the Japanese, the four seasons are not simply regarded as an annual period that is marked by particular weather conditions; each season is life itself, a distinct expression of nature that offers guidance to people on how to live. The Japanese find deep meaning and respect in the rhythm of each season.

Even the name of Japan is rooted in the country's relationship with nature. Situated to the east of neighboring countries, the archipelago is comprised of four major islands—Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu (from north to south.) To the southwest of Kyushu is the 1000 km-long chain of the Ryukyu Islands that includes Okinawa. The characters that make up the name for Japan—日本 *Nihon* or *Nippon*, officially the **State of Japan**—mean 'sun origin.' The dawn of each new day is reflected in the name that is often used—"Land of the Rising Sun."

## Learning to Live in Harmony with Nature



### The Cycle of Life in Nature's Four Seasons

From ancient times to the present, living in harmony with nature has reflected the Japanese sensitivity to seasonal change. The changing of the seasons—a circle of life in which new born life begins in spring, thrives in summer, bears fruit in autumn, and withers away in winter toward death—is an important part of Shinto, Japan's native belief system that is highly focused on the cycles of the earth and of life. Nature is not merely equivalent to scenery; nature's power, kindness, strength, gentleness, demands and generosity forge the character of the Japanese people. The Japanese awareness of the brevity of nature and the inevitability of change in nature's ongoing cycles have given form to their beliefs, aesthetics, rituals, and celebrations that are themselves harmonious with nature's beauty and transitory spirit.

### Capturing the Poetic Cycle of Life

As the four seasons move across the Japanese landscape, time-honored rituals are practiced. For instance, on the four major islands (home to almost 98% of the people and 98% of total land area), the Japanese herald signs of spring first on the southern island of Kyushu in late March as the *sakura*, cherry trees, awaken. In Sapporo (Portland's sister city) on the northern island of Hokkaido, they bloom as late as May. The cherry blossom front—marked by *kaika* or the subtle beginnings of blossoms—tends to occur late March/early April in most major cities, such as Tokyo and Kyoto on the largest island of Honshu. *Mankai*, the peak of the blossoms, follows the next week. This spectacular show of beauty is fleeting as the blossoms are scattered by the winds of spring a week after reaching their prime. The Japanese have a word for viewing the transitory cherry blossoms—*hanami*. *Hanami* is a centuries-old form of retreat for contemplating and renewing spirits as thousands of people fill the parks to celebrate under the flowering trees.



The tradition of *hanami* has its historic roots in the early 9th century when Emperor Saga of the Heian Period (794-1185) held flower-viewing parties with sake and feasts under the scented blossoms of the *sakura* trees in the imperial court in Kyoto. *Hanami* parties also included the practice of writing poems in praise of the delicate flowers while encompassing deep reflections on the cycle of life—beautiful and luminous yet momentary and fleeting.



Midnight full of stars  
Dim cherry petals  
Floating on rice-paddy waters

Buson (1716-1784)