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## Gardens of Rejuvenation

Meditation gardens dot the Southland, helping visitors escape the stress of daily life for a few tranquil moments.

By BRENDA REES, Special To The Times

Summer's here and the living is easy. Make that supposed to be easy. Let's face it--stress rarely takes a holiday, which could mean that your frenetic summer state of mind may need a little help. Meditation gardens--especially the many Japanese-style gardens around the Southland--can provide the setting for rejuvenating those spiritual batteries.

Kendall Brown, author of "Japanese-Style Gardens of the Pacific West Coast" and art professor at Cal State Long Beach, explains, "Most Japanese-style gardens in Southern California have at their base an idea of escaping the world, this machine age that we live in, to a simpler place where one is surrounded by the calming influence of nature.

Americans create Japanese-style gardens for numerous reasons, Brown says by phone from Tokyo, noting that gardens were started for a particular function, whether by a millionaire to show off his expensive tastes, civic-minded communities to reestablish their ties to Japanese ancestry, or universities to commemorate their international flavor.

"The Japanese garden is so adaptable it can serve a variety of purposes," Brown says. Here in Southern California, Japanese gardens were created as early as the turn of the century and as recently as the mid-1980s. "In some Southern California communities, there are more Japanese gardens than bowling alleys," he adds.

Don't expect bright colors or heavily perfumed flowers in Japanese gardens. "They are very monochromatic and green," Brown says. "But these colors help us to pull our eyes into deep space, which produces a very calming effect."

Any meditation garden invites the visitor to really stop and examine the scenery while emptying the mind of clutter. Here is our list of quiet, contemplative Southland spots arranged from north to south.

### The Serra Retreat Center Gardens

Nestled high in a Malibu canyon is a cozy retreat house that has been welcoming the spiritually weary for more than 50 years. Run by the Franciscans, the Serra Retreat Center has stunning panoramic views of the ocean and picturesque hillside gardens. The winding paths lead to Stations of the Cross, a small grotto, hillside benches, and a patio area where a statue of Father Junipero Serra beckons guests to stop and rest awhile.



June Ikuma of Los Angeles keeps cool under her flower umbrella as she enjoys the view of the Japanese Garden at the Donald C. Tillman Water Reclamation Plant in Van Nuys.  
*BOB CHAMBERLIN / Los Angeles Times*

"I come here to sit, be alone and be quiet," says Kelly Basehart of Los Angeles while showing the gardens to her New York friend Pat Jones. "It's relaxing even when it's pouring down rain," says Basehart.

The public is welcome on the grounds during daytime but is not allowed inside the retreat facilities.

Serra Retreat Center, 3402 Serra Road, Malibu, (310) 456-6631.

### **Self-Realization Fellowship Lake Shrine**

Even with the tens of thousands of visitors who come to the Self-Realization Fellowship Lake Shrine every year, it's still possible every day to find a secluded bench or rock overlooking the tranquil lake and windmill for some quality private time.

The Lake Shrine, founded by Paramahansa Yogananda, marks its 50th anniversary this year, and is an international organization that is based on Yogananda's teachings. The Lake Shrine has a Court of Religions where symbols of the five major religions are displayed as a way to remind visitors of the unity and commonality of all religions.

"We have two types of people who come here," says Lauren Landress, assistant director of public affairs. "Tourists come to see the beauty of the shrine and to view our Gandhi memorial, which is the only known repository of Gandhi's ashes. But locals come here for a 'mini-retreat,' whether it's for 20 minutes or two hours. They see this place as a sanctuary."

Self-Realization Fellowship Lake Shrine, 17190 Sunset Blvd., Malibu, (310) 454-4114.

### **The Japanese Garden at the Donald C. Tillman Water Reclamation Plant**

In one of the strangest places to plant a garden--right next to a water treatment facility--city officials in Van Nuys have found an unusual way to use taxpayers' money. The garden was designed to demonstrate how reclaimed water could work in a delicate environment.

Guests can purposefully get lost in the 6½ acres of gardens that contain floating bridges, crashing waterfalls and perches for egrets and cormorants that fly in from the nearby wildlife reserve.

Many elements of the Japanese-style garden--such as the black pine trees and various bamboo--have been imported from Japan, says Gene Green, garden manager. "Every step you take in the garden reveals something as it hides other elements," he says.

The Japanese Garden at the Donald C. Tillman Water Reclamation Plant, 6100 Woodley Ave., Van Nuys, (818) 756-8166.

### **The Zen Garden at the Huntington**

Sitting on a bench overlooking the stark, dry Zen garden with intricate patterns raked in the sand, two women lazily gossip, until there's a pause. "I don't want to talk anymore," one admits, "I just feel like being quiet."

Indeed, the Zen garden at the Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens has a mesmerizing effect. Up the hill from the popular Japanese-style garden where children squeal and guests pose for pictures near a red bridge, the Zen garden demands quiet from the moment visitors enter the courtyard.

Open to the public in 1968, the Zen garden has swirls of sand groomed around carefully positioned stones that can represent streams, lakes and islands in keeping with Zen Buddhist tradition; viewers are encouraged to meditate and interpret the images their own way.

Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens, 1151 Oxford Road, San Marino, (626) 405-2141.

### **Amir's Garden and Dante's View, Griffith Park**

"Griffith Park has been so good to me, it has kept me happy and healthy, and I wanted to do something special for the hikers," says 68-year-old outdoor enthusiast Amir Dialameh, who began planting his garden on a hilly slope in 1971.

About 300 feet up from the Mineral Wells picnic area, Amir's Garden is a labor of love for Dialameh and volunteers who help weed, prune, water and remove trash. Orchid, pepper trees and pines shade the area, a place Dialameh calls "a temple or a church. Come here, sit down and talk to God."

Similarly, Dante's View--1.5 miles from the Griffith Observatory--is another garden tended by volunteers where, on a clear day, hikers can see all the way to Catalina Island. "It's an unnatural oasis," says Tom LaBonge, unofficial keeper of the garden for more than seven years.

It is recommended that hikers new to Griffith Park stop or call the ranger station for specific directions to either location.

Amir's Garden and Dante's View, Griffith Park, Los Angeles, (323) 913-7390.



Amir Dialameh hikes to Amir's Garden, which he began planting in 1971, south of the Mineral Wells picnic area in Griffith Park.  
*BOB CHAMBERLIN / Los Angeles Times*

### **The James Irvine Garden**

There's only one way to get to this downtown Los Angeles garden--take an elevator down.

"We usually have people visiting the garden at lunchtime. The garden is a little secret," says Miles Hamada, facilities manager at the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center, where the James Irvine Garden lies hidden.

Hamada says that while the din of the city can be heard in the garden, once inside, you barely notice it. Visitors stroll between the mock orange and plum trees, steal a sigh in a quiet bamboo glen, and listen to the sound of bubbling water.

Built in 1978 with a grant from the James Irvine Foundation, the garden was a far-reaching community project with 200 volunteers donating 3,000 man-hours, including hauling 250 tons of rock from Mt. Baldy. Local nurseries donated more than \$40,000 worth of trees and shrubbery. Even today, the garden is annually maintained by local gardening organizations.

James Irvine Garden, 244 S. San Pedro St., Los Angeles, (213) 628-2725.

### **The UCLA Hannah Carter Japanese Garden**

If you ever imagined wandering alone in your own lush, 2-acre hillside garden, a trip to the UCLA Hannah Carter Japanese Garden in Los Angeles can fulfill that fantasy.

While the garden is big, the parking arrangements are not--there are spots for two cars every hour, so reservations are required.

Once inside, visitors can follow hidden paths through plants, stones and water that symbolically trace life's transition from wild youth to sedate maturity. Many structures--the main gate, garden houses, bridges and shrines--were built in Japan and reassembled here when the garden was being created in 1959 as a private backyard retreat for oilman Gordon G. Guiberson.

Chairman of the University of California regents, Edward W. Carter and his wife, Hannah, purchased the estate in 1965 and later that year donated the garden to UCLA.

Docents such as Stuart Shaffer are on hand by the front gate to answer questions. Shaffer rattles off history, horticulture, and will even recite poetry that reflects the garden.

UCLA Hannah Carter Japanese Garden, 10619 Bellagio Road, Los Angeles (310) 825-4574.

### **Earl Burns Miller Japanese Garden**

While there are many contemplative spots in this 1.3-acre garden next to Cal State Long Beach--such as the dry Zen garden or benches near azaleas and Japanese irises--regular visitors seem to make a beeline to the zigzag bridge that overlooks the central pond.

On this platform, folks can see hundreds of multicolored koi. At certain points during the day, fish food is left out so guests can sprinkle pellets into the trembling mouths of hungry koi.

Watching fish--or birds--can be highly therapeutic, says Lyn Kelley, a nurse from the nearby VA hospital who regularly visits the garden. "I come here to clear my head," she says. "Today the smell of the gardenias and feeding the koi will help me get through the day."

Lorraine Miller Collins donated the money to build the garden that was dedicated in 1981 in memory of her late husband, Earl Burns Miller; both were involved in philanthropic activities in Long Beach.

In November, the garden is host to an annual koi roundup, where these prized public fish are auctioned off and sent to live in private homes. Earl Burns Miller Japanese Garden, 1250 Bellflower Blvd., Long Beach, (562) 985-8885.



Visitors can feed the multicolored koi fish at certain times of the day at the Earl Burns Miller Japanese Garden at Cal State Long Beach.  
*BOB CHAMBERLIN / Los Angeles Times*

### California Scenario

The artificial and organic come together gracefully in a modernistic landscape that's as much sculpture as it is garden. Sandwiched between office towers and a parking structure near Costa Mesa Shopping Center, California Scenario is the work of Japanese American artist Isamu Noguchi, who was commissioned to design a tribute to California ecologies.

A stream of water rushes down a 30-foot-tall granite sluice lined with small stones. It flows into a gentle creek that appears and disappears under flagstones, finally vanishing under a compressed pyramid.

A small grove of redwoods and wild grasses flanks one end of the landscape; at another end, a low circular "island" of gravel contains desert plants. White granite benches, as well as large flat boulders, are scattered around the area.

Nanette Camporeale works in one of the nearby office buildings and frequently spends her lunch out in the garden. "It's quiet and relaxing," she says before heading back to the office. "You can get lost looking at all of this."

California Scenario, 611 Anton Blvd., Costa Mesa, (714) 435-2100.