

MEETING REPORT - Gardens of Japan

John Baker took us on an entertaining and colourful journey around the gardens of Japan. He and his wife June are “plants people” with a particular love of hostas. Their garden has a national collection, see more at : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMiVUWUktRk>.

Their love of hostas led them to Japan, and John took us through the different types of gardens that exist in Japan and explained how they developed.

The Japanese style was brought to the West by Josiah Conder, who wrote “Landscape Gardening in Japan”, the bible for all Western Japanese gardens. Gardens in Japan originated in AD607 from China with Hill and Pond Gardens. Before this the Japanese focused on worshipping nature rather than taming it. “Stroll gardens” evolved for the nobles, then Zen Buddhism changed gardens into places of contemplation: wabi to stimulate the mind, and sabi to stimulate the senses. Gardens were incorporated into the tea ceremony to emulate the walk to the tea house. His entertaining and illuminating commentary was enhanced with beautiful photographs of gardens during the Cherry Blossom season. (Sadly, a technology problem affected the colours in his photos.) Highlights included:

Peonies in Ueno Park, where umbrellas and straw houses protect them. At Ginza Shopping Centre, a food hall sells Montana hostas for stir fries! Nikko Botanical Garden, a World Heritage site, where the carving of the Three Wise Monkeys was brought back by Victorian travellers. Kiyomizu Temple, with a balcony 30m above the garden where “to take the plunge” meant jumping off and, if you survived, your wishes would be granted! Miyajima Island, had a monastery garden full of little statues to commemorate dead monks. We saw temples, shrines, stroll gardens, perfectly raked dry gardens, bridges, water features and, of course, hostas and cherry blossom. At the close of his talk, John gave us some advice on how to add a Japanese touch to our gardens with rocks, in odd numbers, in a triangular pattern, partly in the ground. Stepping stones, both in a zig zag and as a continuous flow, and water - a waterfall source, a pond, or stone basin with a bamboo pipe to fill it. Lanterns - preferably made of natural stone, and of course hostas, moss, ferns, and trees.

To “prevent holes” in his hostas, John uses garlic as a spray to deter slugs and snails, and recommends boil 2 bulbs of garlic crushed to 2 pints water, add 2 tablespoons of this to a litre of water, and spray plants liberally every 2 weeks. Rain washes it off so garlic granules can also be spread around.

www.bowdenhostas.com/pages/Garlic-Wash-Recipe

Hostas were thought to be part of the Dahlia family until 1973 when Kew recognised their own genus, with 10,000 different varieties identified. Not all can be bought as some are in private gardens but a “Hostapedia” lists them all. John and June’s garden in Hampshire is open with the National Open Gardens Scheme during July.