

A Garden Zen  
Christopher Cannon

Many glorious gardens have risen to prosperity throughout time. Providing an abundance of natural resources to the creatures lucky enough to surround them. Some may wither away, some may adapt and learn to survive the ever Changing forces of the universe in which we live. We humans seem to have developed quite an emotional and even spiritual connection to what we would call a garden. It seems that the act of gardening may turn out to have a wider array of benefits to us than meets the eye. Psychologically, emotionally and even physically helping keep us balanced. Many people undoubtedly love gardens and the act of gardening. But why?

Lets take a quick dive into this inquiry and analyze what may be going on here from a few different angles. Therapeutic at times even zen like, gardening very often can help you momentarily forget life stresses. People can spend hours upon hours in their garden, keeping it tidy or just sitting and enjoying their afternoon tea. Maybe reaping a bountiful harvest of all sorts of vegetables, grains or fruit. This can provide some much needed relief from the stresses of the workday, family relationships, or finances.

In my Western mind I often associate the zen state of mind with meditation. A form of Buddhism Zen meditation, or (Zazen) may very well have a significant influence here. "At the heart of the Japanese culture lies Zen, a school of Mahayana Buddhism. Zen is, first and foremost, a practice that was uninterruptedly transmitted from master to disciple, and that goes back to the Awakening of a man named Siddhārtha Gautama (Shakyamuni Gotama in Japanese) - The Buddha - 2500 years ago in India. The practice of Zen meditation or Zazen (-za meaning sitting, and Zen meaning meditation in Japanese), is the core of Zen Buddhism: without it, there is no Zen. Zen meditation, is a way of vigilance and self-discovery which is

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practiced while sitting on a meditation cushion. It is the experience of living from moment to moment, in the here and now. Zazen is an attitude of spiritual awakening, which when practiced, can become the source from which all the actions of daily life flow - eating, sleeping, breathing, walking, working, talking, thinking, and so on.)” ([zen-buddhism.net](http://zen-buddhism.net),17)

Meditation helps equip individuals with the ability to calm and slow the mind. This often being related to action, it could seem that the zen experience must easily manifest through gardening. Furthermore it would seem to make sense that in Eastern places of the world they have become well accustomed to “Zen Gardens”.

In my studies specifically “Japanese Rock Gardens” seem to catch my eye. The Zen rock garden of the Ryoanji Temple In Japan stands out to me. “It’s the kind of thing you simply have to experience for yourself. Otherwise, the Ryoanji Temple in Kyoto, Japan, a United Nations World Heritage site, simply defies the imagination. The garden, after all, has no plants—no flowers, no trees, not even any weeds.



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It's a 30- by 10-meter (roughly 98- by 32-foot) rectangle surrounded by earthen walls on three sides and a wooden veranda on the fourth. Inside the rectangle is a vista of white pebbles and 15 rocks. And it is world famous for the peace and serenity anyone and everyone who visits it feels. (NatGeo, 17)

In all of its incarnations, the phenomenon of gardening can be observed almost anywhere on Earth, and I imagine likely on other planets. So many types of gardens have manifested in our relative history as humans.

Just to name a few from the top of a wikipedia search; There are Chinese gardens, Dutch gardens, English gardens, Anglo-Japanese style, Landscape gardens, French gardens, French formal gardens, French landscape garden, Gardens of the French Renaissance, Greek gardens, Italian gardens, Italian Renaissance gardens, Anglo-Japanese style gardens, Japanese rock gardens, Japanese tea gardens, Korean garden, Persian gardens, Spanish gardens, Andalusian Patio, United States gardens even Colonial Revival gardens. (Wiki,17) Some gardens would seem to focus more on architecture and formal beauty, but some may serve a more practical function to the people and animals surrounding.

Some other health benefits have been found in the dirt itself. "Dirt?" you may ask. Whats good about dirt? Well almost everything is good about dirt, except maybe being dirty. "UK scientists suggest that a type of friendly bacteria found in soil may affect the brain in a similar way to antidepressants. Researchers from Bristol University and University College London discovered using laboratory mice, that a "friendly" bacteria commonly found in soil activated brain cells to produce the brain chemical serotonin and altered the mice's behavior in a similar way to antidepressants. They are suggesting this could explain why immune system imbalance could make some people vulnerable to mood disorders like depression." (Choan,16)

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So breathing in dirt air may actually turn out to be therapeutic and good for your health. Japanese rock Gardens most certainly are here to stay, constantly maintained and admired by hundreds of thousands of people across Japan. There even is an application gardening relates to in the practicing of ZaZen Buddhism. Furthermore, it would seem to be apparent that being outdoors and moving around is most certainly good for your physical health. Combined with the other emotional, and psychological benefits that we just explored I would say that gardening is the way to grow, America.

Works:

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