

Komo-maki (or why is that tree wearing a straw mat?)!

-OO4OJEFSNBO.(JOUFSOm

Much has been written about understanding the Japanese garden and the elements and techniques that distinguish them from gardens of other countries. Japanese gardens may be classified broadly into two groups: those meant to be experienced by entering and walking in them, and those meant to be viewed mainly with the eyes and the mind, perhaps while seated. Visual gardens are designed for meditation and contemplation and are usually viewed from one side only.

Japanese Public Gardens

On a trip to Japan last December, I was privileged to walk through numerous public gardens of the first type in Tokyo. The juxtaposition of the many contemplative strolling gardens with the crowded streets of one of the largest cities in the world was truly amazing. Once immersed in the masterfully designed spaces, I soon completely forgot the teeming streets and thoroughly enjoyed the simplicity, harmony, and refinement of the tranquil and colorful gardens. The Japanese garden is designed with great sensitivity to seasonal change. To my surprise, the fall foliage in early December was brilliant. Japanese people visit public gardens in hoards during these times of seasonal color to view the gardens with a deep appreciation of nature so important in the Shinto religion. Many bowed before the many trees that were centuries old, showing a respect for these amazing survivors of so many seasons.

Conservation of Treasured Trees

Tourists may be surprised to see many trees adorned with straw mat wraps, especially around the older pine trees. The fascinating practice is called komo-maki and is an old method to control pine moths (scientific name *dendrolimus spectabilis*). These insects feed on pine leaves, but when it gets cold in winter, they crawl down the tree to spend the winter in the dead leaves

on the ground. The mat serves as a trap: it's loosely tied at the top but tightly fastened at the bottom. The insects crawl into the mat, where it's snug and warm, and then in spring the mat is removed and burned along with all its inhabitants. Gardeners generally wrap the trunks of pine trees around mid to late October, or prior to the first frost, and remove them around the beginning to the middle of February. Bug control and ornamental decoration in one!



Painstakingly pruned and aesthetically sculpted over hundreds of years, bolstered by wooden poles to maintain its ideal and unique shape.

continued on

*Komo-maki**continued from page 11***Trunk Wrapping for Delicate and Ailing Trees**

Similar to komo-maki is trunk-wrapping (or miki-maki). Gardeners wrap straw matting around the trunks of certain trees to preserve them from the loss of nutrients and moisture, particularly during the long periods of dry, cold winds. Unexpected autumnal or spring frosts can also damage older or delicate specimens, and severely pruned plants are vulnerable until they can recover their vigor.

Today, jute tape is preferred over straw matting as it is much easier to wrap around intricate or delicate branches. In some areas, miki-maki is carried out throughout the year, especially if a tree is in delicate or ailing health. Tree wrapping has been practiced for thousands of years in Japan, where it has been elevated to a kind of art form. Although this practice in Japanese gardens and parks is a measure taken to protect trees in winter, it is derived from the Japanese Shinto tradition of wrapping the trunks of specially honored trees with a braided and twisted rope. Gardens and parks, even in the middle of Tokyo, are treated with tender, loving care. They last not for years, but for centuries.



Koishikawa Krakuen Gardens, laid out in 162