

Tsuru 鶴 Soars

Friends of the Gresham Japanese Garden Newsletter



Autumn Illumination Coming to Tsuru Island

This fall, experience Tsuru Island in a whole new light. Autumn Illumination, coming October 12–24, 2026, will transform the Japanese garden into a luminous evening landscape, revealing its newly landscaped beauty after dusk. Inspired by the tradition of Autumn Illumination in Japan, this immersive experience will build on the quiet elegance of the Japanese garden's landscape in celebration of the fall season.

As the maple trees shift into vibrant color and the conifers reach their seasonal peak, Autumn Illumination will showcase the garden with carefully designed lighting that highlights the unique character and

texture of each tree.

Experience the renovation for the first time entering through a Japanese-inspired architectural entrance gate, and then strolling through an entirely transformed Tsuru Island after dark. Engage yourself in the quiet beauty, serenity, and atmosphere of the Japanese garden in an entirely new way.

This free event is made possible in part by a grant from Travel Oregon, a City of Gresham Cultural Grant, and a rental partnership with Hollywood Lights of Portland. Save the date!

*spring clouds
and a chance of rain
safe in the machiai*

— Bill Peterson



Autumn Illumination in Kyoto, Japan. A maple tree light up.

Ground Cover Blankets Tsuru Island

We've talked a lot in past articles about the plants selected for the renovation — from the maple trees that will eventually fill the mid-level canopy to the Oregon boxwood that remain neatly contained as small shrubs. What we haven't discussed yet is the importance of ground cover.

Ground cover is easy to overlook, but in a Japanese garden it plays an essential role in the overall composition. Beyond practical functions like erosion control, moisture retention, and weed suppression, it shapes how the garden feels and how the eye moves through the landscape. Japanese gardens traditionally rely on layered textures close to the ground — mosses, sedges, dwarf grasses, and low evergreens — to create what might be called "visual silence" between stronger focal points such as boulders, lanterns, or specimen trees.

In this sense, ground cover contributes to the Japanese concept of *ma*: the thoughtful use of space, pause, and restraint that gives the garden its sense of calm. Rather than acting as filler between larger plants, it creates a living surface that allows the garden's more prominent elements to breathe.

A defining quality of Japanese garden ground cover is subtlety. Texture matters more than bloom. Plants are selected not

simply for ornament, but for their ability to weather beautifully, spread gracefully, and harmonize with the surrounding environment. The palette in Tsuru Island's renovation reflects that sensibility well.



Image of dwarf mondo grass.

Dwarf mondo grass, the primary ground cover for Tsuru Island, is particularly effective in Japanese-inspired landscapes because of its restrained character. Its fine, arching foliage creates a calm, uniform surface that almost reads like flowing water from a distance — appropriate for a garden surrounded by water — while also being durable enough to handle full sun.



Image of *Polygala chamaebuxus* 'Grandiflora.'

Polygala chamaebuxus 'Grandiflora', planted near the turtle, prefers shade and introduces a denser, evergreen texture with subtle seasonal

flowers that brighten the space without overwhelming it.



Image of Kinnikinnick.



Image of *Iris japonica*.

Kinnikinnick, used more sparingly, blends naturally into the landscape while helping stabilize erosion-prone areas. *Iris japonica*, planted under the mature Japanese maples will add softness and movement, its blade-like foliage creating rhythm and vertical

contrast even when not in bloom.

Once these ground covers are established, they will create variation without noise. The goal is for the eye to move continuously across the landscape rather than stopping abruptly at isolated specimens. Texture replaces spectacle.

When you visit next time you'll notice thousands of mondo grass plugs planted, as well as the other ground covers. Please be extra careful to stay on the paths. These young plants are super fragile and stressed.

Ikebana

Iris with maple leaves.



Richard Got a Job



Al's Garden & Home rewarded one of our interns a seasonal job this year. Just two weeks after Richard worked as an Exploratory Worksite intern he knew Al's was where he wanted to work.

Richard says he loves everything about his job. We're so thankful to Al's for giving Richard the opportunity to shine.

Ikebana Day



Established in 2020 by the Japan Ikebana Art Association, Ikebana Day honors the ancient Japanese custom of beginning lessons on the 6th day of the 6th month, at the age of 6 symbolizing good luck and a lifelong mastery of the traditional arts. This year's theme flower is Agapanthus.

You don't have to travel far to celebrate Ikebana Day. Our next ikebana class is June 9th. [Register here.](#)

Getting to Know Josh Bond

By Sue Protz

The main priority of the Travel Oregon grant that the Garden received is creating an ADA accessible path. Jim Card met with three potential contractors for the job, and Josh Bond with Bond Masonry stood out exponentially above the others. What Jim saw was someone who showed passion and desire to work with our organization. Since last February, Josh has spent almost every day expertly cutting and setting the bluestone paths.

Sue Protz, Project Manager, has the pleasure of getting to know Josh, and recently interviewed him over lunch.



SUE: Josh, we know what we like about you, so tell me what you like about us.

JOSH: Where do I even start. So many things have been so pleasant about working here. It's been a challenging job site, but you and your community here have made it the best I could imagine.

It's been really fun getting to know all the different cast of characters of the City workers that we share this space with, and you, and Jim and all the volunteers. Getting to work with Francheska too has been a joy and an awesome opportunity. I've been learning a lot.

One of my favorite things is coming in on Monday and seeing all that happened over the weekend, and how your community shows up and gets things done. Makes me self conscious about my timeline.

SUE: Is this the first time you've worked on a Japanese garden?

JOSH: Yes, it is. And, it's also the first time I've worked in a public space. Previous to this all my clients have been residential homeowners or builders of custom homes.

At first, I had a hard time managing my time, because I would have conversations with everyone that came onto the island. But honestly, it's been really awesome knowing that everyone is going to have access to the space, which is a great tie-in to the accessibility piece, and what this Travel Oregon renovation grant is about.

SUE: Tell our readers about the amazing bridges installed on the island.

JOSH: Yeah, I feel like it took a village to get them done: From going to the rock quarry and picking out the columns, to hauling them to Helix, OR to get them wire cut, and then bringing in my guy, David, to build the forms. Oh, and getting them on the island was another huge deal. But, I gotta say, they're beautiful, and I think a real piece of art for the Garden. I'm quite proud of them.

SUE: Living on the westside, you're not really familiar with Gresham. But now that you've been working for a few months here, and like hot lunches, what do you think about Gresham?

JOSH: Haha, I love food, and I love to explore new areas. I'm a big snowboarder, and for the past 20 years I've been driving through Gresham to get to Mt. Hood. It's been really cool being in the heart of downtown Gresham, discovering all these fun restaurants, and the toy store, and the thrift stores. Gresham is a cool place. I will say I'm pleasantly surprised.

SUE: What is the finish you'll be using to seal the stones. There is currently a lot of loose gravel in the grooves.

JOSH: Right now we're at the point of, what I call, cutting and fitting stones. I'll go back through and level things out. Take care of any stones that are rocking, and then clean up a few joints. Some of the joints look tighter in spots and wider in others. I like to 'tune them up.' Then I fill with a polymer sand. It comes dry and you brush it in. And then, when I hose it down, it hardens in place. It will stay good for 5-10 years depending on foot traffic, sun exposure, water. etc. There's two colors: grey and beige. I think we'll use grey for this project.

SUE: So, let's end this interview with asking the ten thousand dollar question. When are you going to be done?

JOSH: Well, I'll tell you what I tell my boys every night at dinner. I will be done when it gets done.

But seriously, I think we're 5-6 weeks away for the island's completion. And then we'll need to tackle the entrance.

TSURU ISLAND IS NOW OPEN WEEKDAY EVENINGS AND WEEKENDS.

During the week while the stone path is installed there is too much danger of tripping. Also, the saw is really loud causing an unpleasant atmosphere.

Thank you for your patience. It's going to be amazing when it's done!

Specialty Courses



Sculptural Bonsai Container Workshop, 2-Part Series: September 6 and September 20, 2-4pm in Boring, OR – \$150

Create a sculptural bonsai container by hand in this two-part ceramic workshop at instructor Laura Dufala's studio. Using slab-building techniques and rich brown clay, participants will design and build a shallow, one-of-a-kind bonsai vessel.

Participants will be invited to think about the character and feeling of a future bonsai while shaping their container—whether windswept,

quiet and balanced, rugged, or terrain-like in form. A selection of authentic bonsai container books and references will be available during the workshop for inspiration and design exploration.

Part One focuses on constructing the container using slab techniques, including shaping, joining, altering forms, and adding surface detail. Containers will remain intimate in scale, approximately 4" x 6" or smaller, allowing participants to focus on refined form and thoughtful composition suited for small bonsai. After pieces are dried, participants will return for Part Two, September 20th, to glaze and finish their work. [Register on website.](#)

No prior clay experience is necessary. All materials, glaze, and firings are included. Workshop fee is \$150 per person.

Workshops

[Register under 'Happenings' on the website](#)

The Art of Bonsai: On the third Saturday, 1-3pm or third Thursday, 6-8pm – \$55

BOBBY CURTTRIGHT, BONSAI MASTER: June class is sold out. July workshop will focus on the unique character of the Pacific Northwest's native Bitter Cherry, *Prunus emarginata*. In this hands-on workshop, participants will learn foundational shaping and styling techniques while working with this elegant and expressive species. The project-based workshops are adapted to the level in your practice. Bobby Curttright was an apprentice to Bonsai Master Michael Hagedorn. Alongside his three-year apprenticeship, Bobby traveled to Japan for weeks at a time to study under Mr. Hagedorn's sensei, the famous Mr. Shinji Suzuki.

Group Kobo: Sunday, June 28, 2026, 9am-12pm in the greenhouse - \$20

This drop-in workshop invites you to bring your bonsai anytime within the timeframe offered. Work on your bonsai in a relaxed, collaborative environment alongside fellow bonsai enthusiasts. Whether you're refining a bonsai's shape, practicing wiring, or planning future enhancements, you'll receive expert guidance from GJG's bonsai master, Bobby Curttright. You will have access to Bobby's bonsai tools and wiring supplies. Please note: repotting supplies will not be provided, as repotting is covered in a separate class.

Introduction to Ikebana: Tuesday, June 9, 2026, 1-3pm – \$50

NANA BELLERUD, IKEBANA TEACHER: Nana Bellerud will lead June's ikebana workshop focusing on popular Japanese spring-blooming plants, and including their symbolism and seasonal meanings. Students explore their creativity and turn their ideas into creative pieces of art.



Volunteer Highlight

Paula Grech

My husband David and I moved to Gresham to be with family following my retirement in 2016.

Having spent 17 years in the non-profit world, working with and training volunteers, I knew the importance of volunteering. Besides spending time with family and golfing, doing something to be a part of the community was a priority.

On daily walks with my dog, Max, we would wander about the Garden. There was always something new to discover. Max loves the rock water basin, I the Peace Garden. On several occasions I would see a number of people working, all wearing the same bright, red vests. Stopping to talk with one of them, I learned they were all volunteers. Being an avid home gardener, I knew I had found the perfect volunteer opportunity.

There is always something new and interesting going on: planting, building, cultural and community events, Bonsai and Ikebana, rentals, the list goes on and on. There's something for everyone. That's in addition to having the opportunity to meet all the visitors who come to enjoy the wonders of the garden.

It is an honor and privilege to be among the amazing, gifted, and committed individuals who volunteer at the Gresham Japanese Garden.