

Tsuru Soars

Friends of the Gresham Japanese Garden Newsletter



Chamber Honoree of the Year

By Jim Card

In April our own Sue Protz was recognized by the Gresham Chamber of Commerce as their Honoree of the Year. The award was given to her in recognition for her involvement and dedication in our community and her commitment to the Gresham Japanese Garden. We are so honored and privileged to have Sue making the future brighter for the Gresham Japanese Garden than one could imagine. She is a driving force behind the garden's outreach, consistently working to create meaningful opportunities for individuals and families. She tirelessly plans events, organizes volunteer projects, and develops

educational initiatives that enrich the community. One notable example is the Exploratory Worksite Program, which serves special needs students.

One of the garden's biggest opportunities yet has been the awarding of the Travel Oregon Grant for 2025/2026, providing \$130,000 toward the improvements to Tsuru Island. Sue wrote the grant proposal, and she has also taken on the role of project manager. All this being said, the best part of all is that we are nowhere to the end of what Sue has to offer to the community and the Gresham Japanese Garden.

*Over the high bridge
Into the garden pathway,
Unwinding Hosta*

— Nana Bellerud



From left: Mayor Travis Stovall, Sue Protz, and 2024 Honoree of the Year, Karen Johnston.

A Place to Rest

At the Gresham Japanese Garden, a group of dedicated volunteers, mostly Chuck Page, recently completed the construction of a machiai in the southeast corner of Tsuru Island. A machiai is a traditional Japanese garden shelter, thoughtfully adapted as a welcoming resting place within nature.

While machiai historically served as waiting areas in tea gardens, the our Japanese garden called for the contemporary approach this with a slightly different intention. Rather than replicating a formal tea ceremony structure, we focused on creating something authentic in spirit, but suited to the garden's everyday use—a rustic place within a natural setting for visitors to pause, sit, and take in the sights and sounds of Johnson Creek.

The design draws heavily from traditional principles. The structure is modest in scale, open and unobtrusive, allowing it to settle naturally into the landscape rather than dominate it. Its intention is not as a destination, but as a quiet invitation to sit, take a pause and view the Japanese garden from a different perspective.

A defining feature of the machiai is its use of round timber beams in place of



Chuck Page applying the final plaster coat.

conventional square lumber. Each post and support retains the natural shape of a tree—subtle curves, taper, and texture still visible. This choice reflects a distinctly Japanese approach to building, where materials are respected for their inherent qualities rather than forced into uniformity. The result is a structure that feels organic, almost as if it grew in place.

The walls incorporate traditional earthen plaster imported from Japan, applied by hand using a mixture of clay, sand, and natural fibers. The

surface reveals gentle irregularities—slight ridges—that speak to the human touch behind the work. Rather than appearing unfinished, these textures give the shelter depth and warmth.

The ochre color of the machiai was chosen deliberately. It echos the color of the surrounding fencing, and over time the soil and bark, allowing the machiai to blend seamlessly into its environment. Nothing

about the structure should call attention to itself; instead, it supports the bigger picture—your experience and interpretation.

Though not used for formal tea gatherings, our machiai remains true to traditional garden design. It creates a moment of pause, encouraging visitors to slow down and become more aware of the space around them—the sound of water, the movement of leaves, the changing light.

In this way, our volunteers have created more than just a machiai, they've built a meaningful and reflective space for the local community.

Mountain Hemlock in Gyozan

container. This tree was collected from Vancouver Island and has been in training since 2018. It is approximately 250-350 years old.



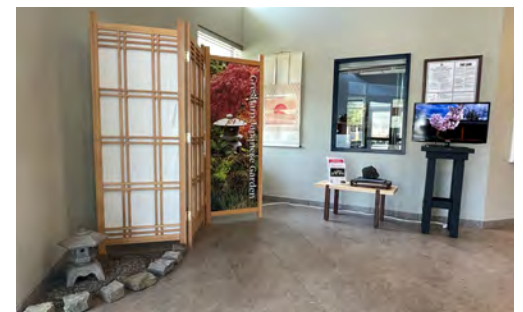
Plant Sale



How about enhancing your landscape with a new shrub, grasses, or maybe a Japanese maple tree? Or, bring home flowers to brighten your deck, or a hanging basket for Mother's Day?

Stop by the Gresham Historical Society, May 8-9. We've got you covered.

We're Back



Thanks to Brenda Felix, Bank Manager at Riverview Bank Gresham, for allowing Gresham Japanese Garden once again to bring awareness to the Gardens.

Stop by, open an account. You won't be sorry to have this bank watching over your funds.



The Power of Stone

The Japanese garden is really starting to reflect the hard work of our craftsmen, along with the support of the GJG volunteers. Last month's update focused on the stone bridges (see [April 2026](#)).

In Japanese gardens, bridges are anchored at all four corners with "pinning stones," known as *hashi-basami-ishi*. Their main purpose is to give the impression that the bridge is solid and grounded. Visually, they mark the beginning and end of the crossing, while aesthetically they're meant to complement the bridge—without being too bold or too subtle. There's a wide range of interpretations (Fig. 1), and this is where our craftsman, Francheska Snyder, really shines. The stone bridges look fantastic.

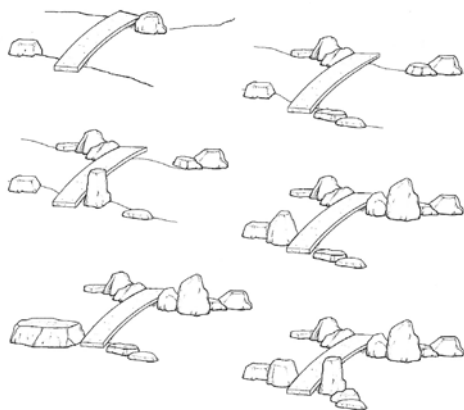


Fig. 1: Anchor stone options

One of the key goals in a Japanese garden is for the rock work to convey a sense of age. The most effective way to achieve this is through thoughtful placement and the depth at which stones are set. Over the past couple of months, this has been a major focus for Francheska, since stone work is foundational to the garden as a whole.

We found 20 boulders from outlying areas which we hoisted onto the island via a crane. She's also been uncovering boulders that had sunk into the earth. Our only piece of power equipment—a Dingo—has been indispensable for lifting, moving, and rotating these massive stones.

Setting boulders is an art in itself. The first step is finding the rock's widest point. From there, you determine the "top," usually by identifying the flattest, most level surface. When a boulder has good "tenba", it appears naturally stable and settled.

When placing a stone, it's typically set into the ground so the soil line aligns with its widest point. There are many factors to consider before the actual setting (Fig. 2).

To make things even more complex, after studying the boulder placement on Tsuru Island, take a look at how the surrounding plantings interact with the stones. Trees, shrubs, and ferns are not simply decorative additions; their role is to enhance and complement the rock work (Fig. 3).

In many cases, plantings are positioned to partially obscure stones, creating a sense that they have been in place long enough for nature to reclaim them. This layering effect adds depth and reinforces the feeling of a living, evolving landscape.

Careful attention is also given to scale and proportion. Low-growing plants help anchor larger boulders, while taller shrubs and trees provide a backdrop that frames the composition without overwhelming it. Seven maple trees have been added, with six already in place. As they mature, they will create an intermediate canopy against the very tall Austrian pines. And, the seasonal color will be beautiful.

Francheska has been thoughtfully coordinating these elements so that each planting decision supports the overall design intent. As more plants get established, they will continue to soften transitions and blur boundaries, allowing the stone work to feel fully integrated into the landscape rather than placed upon it.

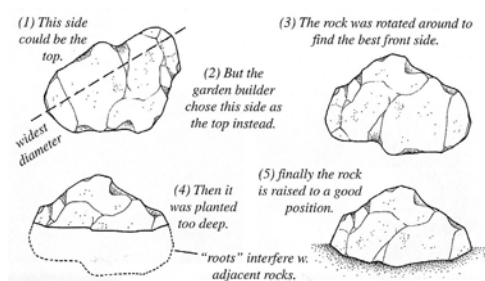


Fig. 2: Finding the widest diameter.

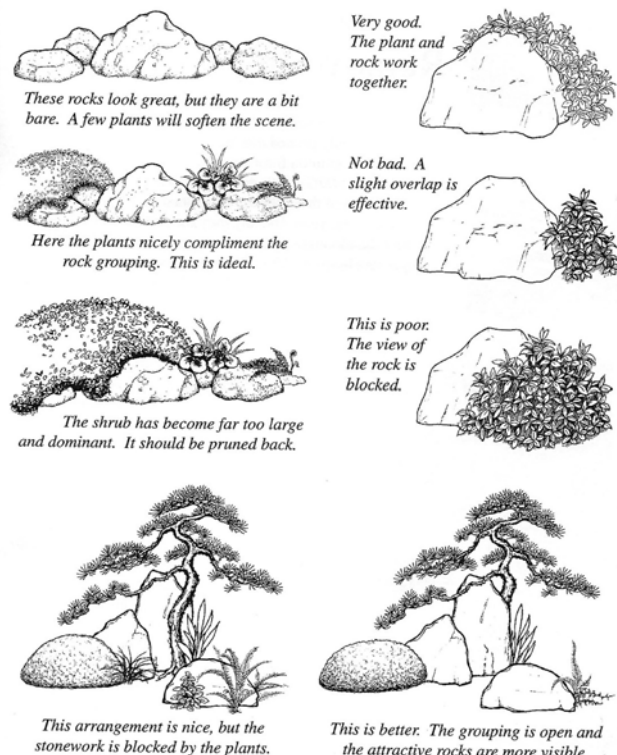


Fig. 3: The role of plants next to boulders.

SOURCE: All of these illustrations are from the 'Sukiya Living' journals.

TSURU ISLAND IS NOW OPEN ON THE 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. Its going to be amazing when its done!

Cultural Events



Ikebana Exhibition: Sunday, May 31, 2026, 11am-3pm at the Gresham Japanese Garden, Kyoudou Center
Visit GJG's first ikebana exhibit led by our ikebana instructor Nana Bellerud and her students with support by Ikebana Iwaya Fund. Demonstration at 1pm. Light refreshments will be served.

Pruning Course

Spring Pine Work: Sunday, May 3, 2026, 1-3pm, \$45 at Bentwood Tree Farm in Boring, OR

Learn about the why's and how's of candling pines at the instructor's pine nursery. When should you remove the whole candle, and when should you break the candles? Laura will candle, needle, and talk about structuring pines, too! Bring your gloves. Laura often turns her class into a collaborative hands-on session.

This workshop is certified by the Oregon Landscape Contractors Board. Licensed landscape construction professionals receive three Continuing Education Hours (CEH). [Register under 'Happenings' on the website.](#)

Workshops

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

BOBBY CURTTRIGHT, BONSAI MASTER: May class will cover single and multi-flush pine species, with a focus on decandling techniques. Your take-home project will be a *Pinus thunbergii*. The project-based workshops are adapted to the level in your practice. Bobby Curtright 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.

Introduction to Ikebana: Tuesday, May 12, 2026, 1-3pm – \$50 in the Kyoudou Center

NANA BELLERUD, IKEBANA TEACHER: Nana Bellerud will lead May'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 arrangements. Register under 'Happenings' on the website.