



Samurai Selling

Learn how Asia's graceful simplicity is influencing gardening sales.

By Liz Huntington

The Orient Express has arrived, and it's headed straight to the garden center! Consumers are turning east and replacing color and complexity with subtlety and sand. Maybe it's the low maintenance and low water usage of rocks, sand and sturdy greenery. But more likely it's because the stressful lives we lead are calling for a place to recover and find our balance, a garden of orderliness and quiet simplicity to escape the hustle and bustle of our chaotic schedules. Lawn and garden retailers can cultivate a thriving business by understanding this trend and serving up serenity.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

First let's understand some basics. Gardening is a very reverent art form in Asia with strong roots in their religion and a time-honored way of life. Gardens and all things in them have meaning and purpose, which creates a kind of beauty that is deeper and subtler than the explosion of color typical of Western gardens. There are two main approaches to Eastern gardening: Japanese Zen (simplicity) and Chinese Feng Shui (the art of arrangement).

Japanese gardens are designed around the core idea of quiet contemplation, so landscaping and accents are minimalist and calming. The overall feeling of serenity is accomplished by using subtle earth tones in sand, rocks and greenery. Some essential décor accents to carry in your store are stone water basins and fountains, known as "tsukubai" or "chezubachi,"

often accompanied by bamboo ladles or spouts. River rocks and sand are essential elements of a Japanese garden, while stone or paper lanterns and wind chimes are also in high demand. Bamboo is a staple material for a trellis, fountain or screen. As for plants, go for the greenery — fern, azalea, juniper, jasmine, ornamental grasses and maple are all strong sellers. Plants must not be high maintenance but provide a muted color palette year-round.

While Japanese gardens strive to minimize elements, the Chinese art of Feng Shui is all about maximizing elements for prosperous energy flow. Feng Shui is a very popular interior decorating method, that has moved outdoors as a natural extension of the indoors. With the correct placement of color and symbols of the five elements (fire, water, earth, metal and wind), you can bask in the energy of everything from monetary abundance to longevity. Or you can fend off unwanted influences that create unhappiness and chaos. Feng Shui is a complex system, often requiring some study or the help of a Feng Shui master. A garden retailer does not need to know all the ins and outs of energy, but you should be aware of some basics and what supplies to carry.

Feng Shui does have explosions of color in plant life, but not the mixed colors found in Western gardens. Solid blocks of color placed in strategic areas are used to promote everything from clarity to calmness. As a garden retailer, you don't need to carry special flowers, just the usual colorful ones already in stock. But carrying garden accents from all five elements has a

The best way to sell Asian-Inspired accents is to create a display garden like this one at Max & Hildy's, Portland, Ore.

Chime

Heath/Zenith's newest wireless Weatherproof Chime is portable and has a battery-operated system that allows the chime to be placed up to 400 feet from the front door. Works well in a shed, by the pool or near the barbeque; the homeowner will be aware of visitors no matter where he or she is on the property. Because this chime is weatherproof, the system will not be harmed by outside elements such as wind, rain, snow or temperature. DESA International. (800) 858-8501. **Write in 1418**



Sculpture

This textured wall-mounted relief adds a prominent focal point to interior or exterior décor with its size and design. Molded from the original, sculpted in 1956, this piece is made of cast white limestone and measures 17½ x 20½ x 4 inches. The sculpture is part of The Cleo Hartwig Collection. Olivia Smith Design. (800) 573-6883. **Write in 1422**



Stone

Flowers of Tomorrow stepping stone is made of ceramic and resin. This stone has a 12-inch diameter. New Creative. (800) 435-1000. **Write in 1419**



Table fountain

The Clematis Vine Wall/Table Fountain measures 16 inches tall. A new addition to the 2005 Hen-Feathers Collection, each fountain is cast one at a time by the lost-wax method for exceptionally fine detail and lasting durability. The Brass Baron. (800) 536-0987. **Write in 1420**

Container

Wasabi Green is a new glaze on the Tall Milan pot. It can be used indoors or out. Anamese Garden Pots. (337) 734-3656. **Write in 1421**



bountiful effect: add-on sales. If a customer asks for a stone fountain (water), then you should also help them complete the other four elements by showing them lanterns (fire), wind chimes (wind), rocks (earth) and gongs (metal).

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The art of placement also translates in merchandising your store. Julia Paul of American Takii, one of Asia's leading flower breeders, stresses the effectiveness of having an "idea garden" that shows the uses and placement of Asian accents. She adds, "The more ideas customers can work with and the more they see, the more their own imagination kicks in and they fill up their cart." Clare Argast of Max & Hildy's Garden Store in Portland, Ore., talks up "superstitious plants" such as Lucky Bamboo and the Money Tree as very popular sellers. As a retailer with a little bit for everybody, Max & Hildy's also sells by placing all its Asian accents in one area. "Plus, they don't mix well with St. Francis," she quips.

Statuary is always a best seller that can instantly add Eastern ambiance. Gods and goddesses such as Buddha and Quan Yin are very popular, as are icons from India such as Gonesh, Lakshmi and Vishnu. Buddha symbolizes peace and harmony, while a pair of cranes means long life. Fu dogs are also an exotic touch not seen at many nurseries.

There are some great books that might be very useful for your customers and help you with add-on sales. *The Feng Shui Garden* by Gill Hale

and *Feng Shui in the Garden: Simple Solutions for Creating a Comforting, Life-Affirming Garden of the Soul* by Nancilee Wydra come highly recommended by the people at American Takii.

In Japanese, Samurai means "to serve." In sales, it means you are serving your customers' needs in the very best manner you can. Whether it's Taoism, Zen, Feng Shui or a combination of all three, it's about balance and harmony in nature. There is serenity in simplicity, and sales in going Asian. 🌸

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Stone and evergreen are key elements of all Asian gardens.