

Toru Tanaka

Toru Tanaka, founder and president of Portland Landscape Design and Japanese Garden Specialty, is a noted authority in Japanese landscape design, construction and maintenance. As a craftsman classically trained in Japanese garden design, he is one of the few in the nation able to create landscapes employing traditional techniques from ancient Japan.

With more than 35 years of experience, Toru has created thousands of public, residential and commercial gardens in Japan and North America. Toru is a master of integrating authentic Japanese landscape design with existing natural elements. He gained his expertise through apprenticeships under Japan's foremost landscape architects. The centuries-old custom of hands-on training in Japanese landscape design and construction is a revered, yet rare, practice today. Because Toru represents the last generation of landscapers who received this traditional type of training, his mission is to share his craft with the landscaping community and the public.

Upon graduating with a degree in landscape architecture at Nishi Nihon Tanki Daigaku in Fukuoka, Japan, Toru apprenticed under Komazo Teraishi at Ueichi/Teraishi Zoen in Kyoto, Japan. During that time, he was selected to assist master landscape designer Saichi Kojima with the creation of the moss garden at the Adachi Museum of Art and the maintenance of the Shugakuin Imperial Villa, among others. He then further honed his technique as a pupil of world-renowned landscape architect Kenzo Ogata in Tokyo, Japan. Working as chief construction supervisor at Tokyo Teien, Toru executed many of Professor Ogata's visions, including the gardens at the official residence of the Tochigi prefecture governor. After eight years, he relocated to Tottori, Japan in 1982 and operated Kyushuu Zoen.

In 1988, at the recommendation of Professor Ogata, Toru was selected by the Portland Japanese Garden in Portland, Ore., to become its eighth garden director since the garden's inception in 1963. While at the Portland Japanese Garden (1988-1991), Toru restored the Natural Garden and designed the Sapporo Plaza in the Flat Garden and the Antique Gate area at the garden's main entrance. Upon completion of the three-year program, Toru worked at Kurisu International, where he managed the construction of hundreds of landscapes, most notably the Anderson Japanese Garden in Rockford, Ill., and the Morikami Museum in Delray Beach, Fla.

In 2000, Toru launched Portland Landscape Design, a design consulting firm focused on Japanese and Northwest natural style. In 2004, he began Japanese Garden Specialty to meet his customers' demand for high-quality garden maintenance and construction services. Toru's projects include the Sasebo Japanese Garden in Albuquerque, NM, the Osaka Garden in Chicago, Ill., and an exhibit garden at the US Botanic Garden in Washington, DC.

To this day, Toru remains the last garden director at the Portland Japanese Garden, and has since redesigned the Tea Garden and restored the Sand and Stone Garden. He currently serves as their chief garden consultant, and frequently leads hands-on workshops for professionals and amateurs in various Japanese gardening techniques. Additionally, he is the official consultant for the Hakone Japanese Gardens in Saratoga, Calif.