**What Is a Bonsai Garden or Nursery?**

The bonsai gardens or nurseries (*bonsai-en*) of Omiya Bonsai Village are at the heart of Japan’s bonsai culture, keeping alive cultivation techniques handed down through generations while supporting subtle innovations. Besides offering trees for sale, a large part of the work of bonsai nurseries has historically been the cultivation and care of bonsai owned by wealthy individuals, including politicians, doctors, and captains of industry.

This tradition continues into the present day, with the gardens looking after bonsai in return for a monthly retainer. Japan’s fluctuating economic fortunes, however, have led to a greater proportion of business being the cultivation and sale of trees to new owners. The bonsai gardens also purchase trees from private individuals; this is an important function, given that many bonsai will long outlive their owners.

Omiya’s bonsai nurseries are also distinct in that they specialize in cultivation rather than growing the trees. Trees are grown elsewhere, and once mature are acquired by the gardens to be painstakingly sculpted into living artworks over timespans that can stretch into decades. To bonsai aficionados, each of Omiya’s seven gardens is known for a certain approach to cultivation, and this specialization has given rise to healthy competition. Tuition for lessons in bonsai has also become part of the business for some nurseries.