

### **Middle Garden (Naka Shin'en)**

The Middle Garden, or Naka Shin'en, is one of the original gardens opened to the public with the shrine in 1895. It was landscaped by Ogawa Jihei VII, a master gardener of the Meiji era (1868–1912), known for his skillful use of rocks and water. It is a pond garden, slightly larger and more open than the West Garden (Nishi Shin'en), which he also created for the shrine's opening.

The Middle Garden is inspired by the Muromachi period (1336–1573). In this period, Zen Buddhism flourished, and exerted a strong influence on the development of Noh drama, the tea ceremony, landscape gardening, and flower arranging.

The garden is airy and open, and a hut along the path serves tea. The garden embodies the *wabi-sabi* aesthetic, the simple beauty found in imperfection and impermanence that is valued in tea ceremony and other traditional arts.

Stepping-stones traverse the pond and are an entertaining feature of the garden that allows for views from the water and from varying angles. The stones differ in height, shape, and size, and follow a playful winding path.

The pond, Soryu-ike, shares its name with the tower on the eastern side of the shrine courtyard, Soryuro Tower. Both are named after the Azure Dragon of the East, one of the celestial guardians in ancient Chinese geomancy.

Flowers in the garden include azalea, water lily, golden lace (*ominaeshi*; *Patrinia scabiosifolia*), and rabbit-ear iris (*kakitsubata*; *Iris laevigata*).