

South Garden

The garden on the south side of the Shinden Hall is deliberately simple and is intended to evoke a sense of solemnity. Looking over the garden from the Shinden toward the twin gates, cedars and pines provide a backdrop to a rock garden of impeccably raked white gravel. These stones are from the Shirakawa district in Kyoto and must be washed regularly to maintain the garden's intended appearance, as replacement stones are no longer available. The trees directly in front of the Shinden are a cherry (left) and a mandarin-orange (right). This combination is considered auspicious and has been associated with the court since the tenth century, when a cherry tree and a mandarin-orange tree were first planted in front of the main ceremonial hall at the Kyoto Imperial Palace.

Important visitors to Ninnaji pass through the South Garden on their way to the Goten Palace. The emperor and his messengers enter through the larger Chokushimon Gate and walk directly across the garden to the Shiroshoin, while other members of the imperial family use the less imposing Kozokumon Gate and pass between the two trees in front of the Shinden when entering the palace complex.