

Yatsunashi Bridge and Japanese Irises

The Yatsunashi Bridge is a bridge consisting of eight planks that zig-zag over the stream (*kyokusui*) that meanders through the garden just south of the Ryuten Rest House. It is flanked by purple and white Japanese “rabbit-ear” irises (*kakitsubata*), which grow in water near the bridge and bloom in early May.

The combination of the bridge and the shallow-flowered irises is inspired by a poem in *The Tales of Ise*, a tenth-century classic of Japanese literature, in which the protagonists stop to rest at a marsh with an eight-planked bridge. The poem itself was inspired by the Japanese irises that were in bloom in the marsh, and the five verses of the poem begin with the five syllables that make up the flower’s name: “ka,” “ki,” “tsu,” “ba,” and “ta.” The poem incorporates this wordplay while expressing the longing for their families that the travelers feel while far away on a journey.