

Notable Plant Life of Urakuen

Urakuen is a living monument to Oda Uraku (1547–1621) and the beauty of Japanese tea gardens. Each of its trees, shrubs, grasses, and mosses was carefully selected, arranged, and cultivated by Horiguchi Sutemi and a landscaping company to create a garden that Uraku would have admired. Its flowering cherry trees and camellias add splashes of color, its stands of tall bamboo screen out the surrounding city, and its ferns and mosses lend a sense of age and dignity to the stonework. Every plant in the garden contributes to the whole, but a few of them are worthy of special note.

Uraku Camellias

The Uraku camellia (*Camellia uraku*) is a hybrid of the Japanese camellia (*Camellia japonica*) and camellias introduced from China between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Uraku had a particular fondness for camellias, and he is said to have cultivated and planted these hybrids near Jo-an. Uraku camellias have medium-sized pink blooms with a single layer of petals surrounding prominent yellow centers. They bloom in March and April and are widely used in flower arrangements for tea gatherings. At Urakuen, they grow along the western wall of the northern Shoin's garden.

Chinese Fringetree

The Chinese fringetree (*Chionanthus retusus*) produces clusters of lacy, fragrant, white blooms in mid-May. The species is relatively rare in Japan, and the Ministry of the Environment's Red Data Book of Endangered Species lists the fringetree's status as Vulnerable (VU). A grove of wild fringetrees that grows just outside of Inuyama was designated a Natural Monument in 1923.

The species has several names in Japanese, including *nanjamonja*, a name that tickled Horiguchi so much that he gave the tree a prominent place in the northern Shoin garden.

Tortoiseshell Bamboo

Tortoiseshell bamboo (*Phyllostachys heterocyclus* f. *heterocyclus*) is a tall, thick-walled bamboo with nodes that slant in alternating directions, creating a zig-zag pattern reminiscent of tortoiseshell. It is a natural variant of moso bamboo (*Phyllostachys edulis*). Historical accounts and illustrations of Uraku's residence indicate that it was surrounded by moso bamboo, so the species was planted throughout Urakuen. The tortoiseshell variant grows in a single patch near the entrance to Gen-an.

Living *Unkin* (Cherry and Maple)

The *unkin* (“cloud-brocade”) motif seen in Inuyama ware has a living counterpart at Urakuen. Just north of the white plaster wall near Kō-an, a cherry tree is growing by the path. Its trunk splits into several branches at roughly head height, and in their midst—growing out of the trunk of the cherry—is a Japanese maple tree.