# Edo-Edibles

## Growing with intention & alongside nature

Kate Nannery

[Image Above: Mountain village small-holding (Ohara, Kyoto)]

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# - Summary -

## *Study Tour of Japan*

Japan is renowned for its exceptional fruit and vegetable production, with many top restaurants sourcing ingredients from specialist growers who use a mix of traditional techniques and modern innovation. The main aim for this trip is to enhance and deepen knowledge of kitchen gardening by learning from Japanese growers, Michelin-starred restaurant suppliers, and small-scale producers. By studying these methods, I'd refine organic growing methods, introduce new high-quality produce, and elevate what is cultivated for culinary purposes. Whilst the focus *is* on edibles, there is a huge amount to be learnt from the ornamental side of Japanese Gardening too, including plant selection, growing techniques and cultural design philosophies.

## *About Me*

I have over six years of experience working in professional horticulture. I started in 2019 as a level 2 apprentice in the South Downsof the UK, learning my craft and building One Garden Brighton - an 18th-century walled garden renovation project that was later opened to the public. On completion, I was promoted to Senior Technician for the educational side of Plumpton College, where I began my level 3 apprenticeship. It was here that I discovered my love for edibles and growing produce. At that moment, I decided that was where I wanted my focus to be, where I tookonmy next role at Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons as a kitchen gardener. I was quickly promoted to senior kitchen gardener and have honed my skills and knowledge in this renowned potager, providing organic seasonal produce for a 2-Michelin-star kitchen - a dream come true! This was where this trip came into fruition. I was given ownership of an area of the garden known as the 'South East Asian Garden', where we had a focus on edibles from this region. I wanted to discover new products that would work in our climate and also learn more about the organic, sustainable practices in this corner of the world. I am eager to continue expanding my knowledge and applying it in a meaningful way. I have now taken on a new role at Stoke Park in Buckinghamshire as Senior Kitchen Gardener, working for a prestigious Indian family who are very keen for me to sustainably deliver a vast array of Asian produce for them to enjoy, so I am keen to bring my learnings from this trip into my new role.

Throughout my horticultural studies, I realised the importance of reducing the reliance on industrial agriculture. Local-grown food production cuts down food carbon footprint, and regenerative small-scale growing promotes soil health, biodiversity and water conservation.

This trip represents an incredible opportunity to refine my craft, strengthen international connections, and ensure that gardens I work in, both ornamental and productive, will be influenced by my learnings.

Kate Nannery

# - Farms -

## *Kajiya Farm: Family-run farm supplying high-end restaurants with micro herbs, baby leaf & edible flowers*



[Images above from left: *Oxalis vulcanicola 'Plum Crazy', Oxalis acetosella, Peashoots* - all being grown as microherbs and edible flowers]

The visit to **Kajiya Farm**, guided by **Yuzuru Kajiya**, provided insight into the management of a diverse, small-scale horticultural enterprise. The farm used both traditional Japanese practices and modern, sustainable methods to produce edible flowers, herbs, and speciality greens throughout the year. With over **20 years of farming experience**, Yuzuru shared a range of technical and seasonal strategies used to maintain soil health, crop diversity, and steady production for both local markets and specialist buyers.

Kajiya Farm has strong roots in **culinary collaboration**. It was originally established by Yuzuru's father, who began growing rosemary at the request of a chef friend during the early rise of Italian cuisine in Japan. What started as a small experiment quickly grew into a specialist herb and edible flower business supplying chefs with ingredients that were, at the time, unfamiliar to the Japanese market. When Yuzuru took over the farm, he continued this chef-focused approach, refining production systems while maintaining a strong priority on **flavour, quality, and ecological responsibility**.

The farm spans multiple sites across Mihara, including lower land and cooler mountainous areas. This variation in altitude is used strategically, particularly in summer, to reduce heat stress and extend cropping windows. Infrastructure includes approximately 35 poly tunnels (7.5 × 25 m), supporting an intensive but well-managed system run by a team of around 20 growers.



[Images above from left: Large polytunnels, *Viola cornuta 'Halo Golden Yellow'* growing through the carefully laid matting, field-grown Mint.

**Soil, Fertility, & Farm Management -** Soil health is clearly important at Kajiya Farm. Well-rotted cow manure sourced from local wagyu farmers is applied once annually in winter. Rather than only relying on purchased inputs, Yuzuru would utilise **fallow periods with chickens** inside his polytunnels. Chicken scratching and manure naturally improve soil structure and fertility. Yuzuru consistently observes stronger crop performance in the season following this practice.

[Image right: Polytunnel in fallow year with chickens roaming freely]

Although green manures have been trialled, Yuzuru found little difference in comparison to chicken-integrated fallow systems. Ground matting is used extensively for weed suppression and longevity, lasting up to five years and carefully lifted and relaid during manure applications.

**Crop Production Practices -** Production at Kajiya Farm is highly methodical. Fast-turnover crops such as baby leaves and microgreens are sown every two days to ensure consistency of supply. **Dense sowing** allows crops to be harvested at multiple stages - micro size first, followed by baby leaf harvests.

Microgreens are grown using fresh, purchased compost (JA Vegetable Specific compost, NPK 1:10:1) to avoid disease issues. **Germination techniques** are precise: micro herbs are germinated in darkness for 2–3 days, depending on variety, placed under LED lighting for two days, and then finished with a full day of natural sunlight, which Yuzuru believes significantly strengthens the plants.

[Images above from left: Microgreen set up with LED lighting, Poly-grown baby leaf mustards, Microherbs germinating in racks with blackout covering]

**Irrigation** methods vary by crop type. Poly tunnel crops are watered overhead in the evenings without noticeable leaf damage, while field crops use trickle irrigation. Microgreens are watered from below to minimise damping-off and disease.

**Seasonal Cropping -** Seasonality dictates crop choice.
**Winter**: *Violas, Calendula, Primula*, nanohana (*Brassica napus* - Rape) and mustard greens
**Spring**: A mix of foraged crops such as *Robinia pseudoacacia* blossoms. Polytunnel-grown *Pentas lanceolata*, *Cosmos*, buckwheat (*Fagopyrum esculentum*), and field perennial herbs, including *Mint, Achillea*, and *Salvia*.
**Summer**: Brassicas are avoided entirely due to the hot climate. Instead, herbs and edible flowers take priority, with **pests being mostly tolerated** as foliage damage does not affect the final product enough. Crops include *Anise hyssop*, Thai basil, *Tagetes* (Marigold), and *Calendula* for teas.
**Autumn**: Mushroom foraging becomes important, particularly pine mushrooms (matsutake), which are highly prized in Japan. Beds and fields begin rotation, and chickens go into the chosen polytunnel for fallow.

[Image above right: Edible flowers harvested, *Tagetes & Cosmos*]

**Marketing & Utilisation -** The farm's close relationship with chefs and high-end restaurants underpins its success. Edible flowers and speciality leaves are supplied to restaurants, while excess or imperfect produce is sold to breweries and distilleries for infusions. Waste is minimised, and even infrastructure choices such as repurposed rice-growing trays for microgreens reflect a practical, **resource-efficient mindset**.

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## *Midori Farm – Mountainous organic working farm & educational centre*

Midori Farm is run by **Chuck Kayser** and is located in a **mountainous area** an hour north of Kyoto. The farm operates not only as a production site but as a response to some of the issues facing Japanese agriculture, which Chuck informed us has a heavy reliance on chemical inputs, an ageing farming population, and widespread farm abandonment - something others touched on throughout this trip.

Chuck's approach centres on combining **traditional Japanese farming** techniques with **modern organic practices** to create **resilient systems** that are accessible to new growers. Midori Farm's broader goal is to **help inspire and teach** the next generation of organic farmers and help them succeed. He does this through farm tours, hands-on tutorials, conference talks, and ongoing **educational programmes**.

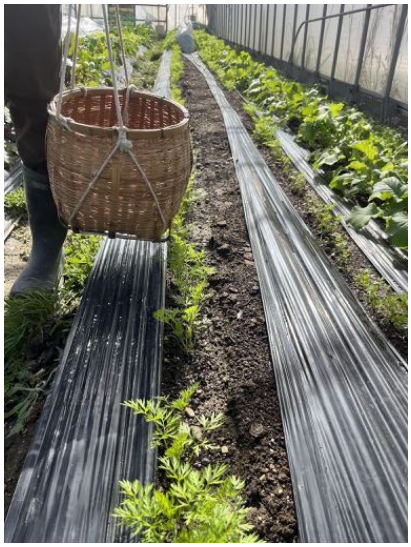
The farm sits at approximately 300 metres above sea level in a mountain village **fed by natural springs**. The climate is 3–6°C cooler than the surrounding lowland areas, which means it has lower humidity and lighter airflow. Despite being in Japan, the seasonal extremes - over 30°C in summer and down to -5°C in winter - are **comparable to UK growing** conditions, making many of the systems directly relatable.

[images right: Negi green onion and rice paddy]

**Crop Diversity, Experimentation, & Seeds -** Midori Farm grows around **70 different crop varieties**, balancing reliable staples with ongoing experimentation by trying new varieties. When we visited, Chuck was **trialling crops** such as peanuts (*Arachis hypogaea*), which he said are particularly effective for engaging children during educational visits, as they get to harvest the legumes straight out of the ground. **Seed availability** in Japan is limited, making seed saving essential, and any other seeds are sourced mainly from overseas. Heirloom varieties are preferred, although Chuck highlighted that not all crops grow true to seed, requiring careful selection and observation over time. This means that it is important for local adaptation by letting crops evolve to suit the mountain conditions, sometimes accepting variation and letting certain varieties **build up resilience**.

**Pest Pressure & Practical Responses -** Pest management at Midori Farm reflects the **realities of organic growing** rather than idealised systems. Key challenges include macaque monkeys, which can bypass fences entirely, as well as leaf roller caterpillars, crickets, cicadas, cabbage moths, cucumber beetles, stink beetles, and moles.





[images above from left: crops covered with enviromesh, crops grown on raised ridges, plastic sheeting used as mulch]

Some pests, such as cucumber beetles, cause disproportionate damage - a small infestation can wipe out an entire cucumber crop due to **bacteria in their saliva**. Pest responses are largely low-tech and observational: manual removal, spacing for airflow, crop selection, and non-synthetic deterrents such as castor oil sprays for moles. The absence of natural predators for certain pests, particularly stink beetles, highlights the limits of control and the need for **acceptance and adaptation.**

**Modern Organic Techniques -** While rooted in traditional methods, Chuck makes strong use of **modern tools** where they add value. Soil **temperature monitoring apps** are used to guide planting decisions, acknowledging that fixed calendar dates are becoming less reliable under **climate change**. Plug-grown crops are favoured to allow earlier establishment and reduce risk.

**Selling produce** is made more efficient through local market systems that allow farmers to digitally label produce and leave it to sell without manning stalls. Midori Farm uses this system at the **Woody Keihoku Local Market**, saving time and labour.

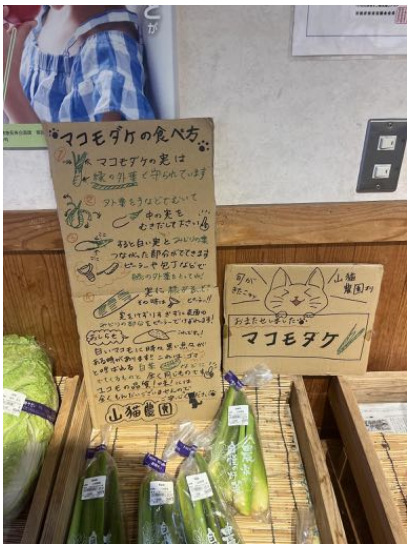
[image above right: persimmons growing on the side of Chuck's land]

A **government-supported composting programme** allows Chuck to collect local food waste and convert it into compost, closing nutrient loops within the surrounding area. The farm also runs programmes that combine farming with English-language learning, encouraging participants to engage with nature and reflect on their ***ikigai*** - their sense of purpose.

**Tools & Traditional Techniques -** A small number of versatile hand tools are central to daily work:

- **Flat hoe:** bed and ridge formation
- **Bitchu hoe:** deep tillage and soil clod breaking
- **Sickle:** harvesting and weed control

[image right: We went shopping! We visited a local garden centre where I could grab a handheld bitchu hoe and sickle for myself made from lovely Japanese steel]




**Raised ridges** are a defining feature of Japanese farming observed at Midori Farm and other growing sites. Ridge height and shape vary depending on drainage and crop needs, ranging from flat-topped 10cm ridges for leafy greens to rounded 20cm ridges for poorly draining soils. Spacing between ridges is generous, allowing **access and airflow**.

[image left: produce being sold at the Woody Keihoku market, with homemade cooking and nutritional information provided by the grower]

**Rainy season management** relies heavily on ridge design, drainage trenches, and careful timing of tasks such as pruning to reduce disease spread. **Intercropping, crop rotation and mixed planting** are used to mitigate continuous cropping disorder, balance nutrient use, and reduce pest pressure.

**Soil fertility** is maintained through locally sourced chicken and cow manure, volcanic soil richness, and leaf mould collected from surrounding woodland. Fallow periods are treated as essential rather than optional.

Local **rice paddies** provided an additional insight into **integrated systems**. While rice does not biologically require flooding, paddies are **flooded to suppress weeds**. Water from mountain springs is channelled through fields and controlled using wooden shunts. Fish are allowed to swim freely through the fields when flooded, controlling mosquitoes and contributing to fertility.

# - Farmers Market -

## *Ohara Farmers Market*

A visit to Ohara Farmers Market is highly recommended to get a clearer understanding of what **local people** are growing, eating, and valuing. The market provided a very grounded snapshot of **regional food culture**, with produce that reflected both **seasonality** and long-standing **local traditions**.



[images above from left: Farmers market in Ohara, various squashes, sweet potato vines]

Unlike larger commercial markets, the produce here felt closely tied to home cooking, preservation, and medicinal use. Many crops were sold in multiple forms — **fresh, dried, or processed** — showing how nothing is viewed as single-use. The emphasis was less on novelty (Not the huge, “perfect” fruit we were seeing in the supermarkets!) and more on practicality, flavour, and cultural relevance.



[images above from left: Perfect fruit in supermarket, dried Persimmon leaves for tea, Hinona kabu, heirloom turnip]

Several crops stood out for their versatility and historical significance:

- **Persimmon (*Diospyros kaki*)**: sold both as fresh fruit and as dried leaves for tea, highlighting how different parts of the same plant are used across seasons
- **Butterfly pea (*Clitoria ternatea*):** flowers were dried for tea, often blended with lemongrass
- **Taro (*Calocasia esculenta*):** widely grown in the area and sold in multiple edible forms. The tuber is well known, but the leaves and stalks are also eaten once thoroughly cooked. The stalks are valued for their crisp texture and nutritional content, reinforcing how the whole plant is utilised
- **Yamaimo:** a sticky yam eaten raw, was particularly notable. Grated into *tororo*, it is used to top rice or dress sashimi. It predates rice in Japan and has been eaten since before the Jomon period, emphasising how deeply embedded it is in Japanese food history


[images below: Akebia fruit, Yaro in the field in Ohara]

The market also highlighted crops that are rarely seen outside of local contexts:

- **Hinona Kabu:** an heirloom turnip, is known for its bright pink colour once pickled. It is largely confined to farmers markets and home growers, making it both culturally and agriculturally significant.
- **Imozuru:** (sweet potato vines and leaves) showed how the above-ground parts of staple crops are actively eaten. The vines and leaves are used in stir-fries and steamed dishes and have a high fibre and vitamin content.
- **Chayote squash:** appeared as a versatile vegetable that can be eaten raw or cooked, changing flavour as it matures.
- ***Akebia quinata:*** (chocolate vine) was sold as a seasonal delicacy. Although the fruit is edible, its slimy texture and bitter seeds make it more of a curiosity than a flavour-driven ingredient, illustrating how tradition sometimes outweighs taste. It's an aquired taste!
- **Mizuna**, a winter mustard green, a bitter salad leaf for the colder months.

One of the most significant observations was the presence of the **rare and protected red shiso** (*Perilla frutescens var. crispa*), for which the Ohara area is particularly famous. This variety has been cultivated here for over 800 years and is **legally protected** to preserve its unique characteristics. Growers are restricted from planting other shiso varieties nearby to **prevent cross-pollination**, and if they do, crops must be harvested before flowering. Red shiso is available only from June to August and is primarily used for dried teas

and the fermented pickle ***shibazuke***. Its protection highlights how agriculture here is as much about **safeguarding cultural heritage** as producing food.

[image above right: information signage about the protected red shiso; below left: Ohara vegetable seller signage]


Overall, the Ohara market demonstrated how farming, food, preservation, and identity are closely linked, with produce reflecting both **local ecology** and long-standing **eating habits**. There was a strong emphasis on local identity, seasonality, and clear producer connection. Markets such as Ohara and Woody Keihoku showcased produce that **reflected regional climates, seasonality, and cultural food preferences** rather than uniformity.

## - Overlaps -

### *Production to Consumption*

Dinner at **Vegan Ramen UZU Kyoto**, a Green Michelin Star restaurant, provided a clear link between low-impact farming and high-end food culture. The restaurant sources produce through **On-The-Slope**, a supplier committed to supporting organic and low-input farmers.

On-The-Slope's model addresses a common challenge faced by small-scale growers: inconsistent volumes. By linking around 300 mainly Western-Japanese farmers to restaurants, retail, and direct sales, the company provides stable markets while promoting farming systems that **do not "borrow from the future"** through chemical dependency.

[image left: Vegan ramen cooked with vegetables sourced from On-The-Slope growers; Image right: Green Michelin star for sustainable culinary practices]

This connection between farm-level practices and consumer-facing food reinforced the idea that sustainability depends as much on **distribution and market structures** as it does on growing methods.

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### *Culinary & Medicinal*

Despite not being a commercial growing site, **Takeda Garden for Medicinal Plant Conservation** in Kyoto was a great example of how many edible plants also play a role in health and medicine. With around **60–70% of medicines derived from natural sources**, the boundary between edible and medicinal plants felt very intertwined.

[images below from left: Medicinal herb garden with information boards, *Hibiscus sabdariffa* edible bud, Praying mantis next to a Yuzu (*Citrus junos)*]

Examples of plants with both edible and medicinal uses included:

- **Japanese mint (*Mentha arvensis var. piperascens*)**: Used for headaches and early cold symptoms
- ***Hibiscus sabdariffa*:** Flowers and buds are used both culinarily and medicinally
- **Wasabi (*Eutrema japonicum*)**: Rhizome used as a condiment with antimicrobial properties
- **Liquorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*)**: Used as a sweetener in Kampo medicine, miso, soy sauce, and confectionery
- **Sudachi citrus:** Used for its sharp acidity and aromatic qualities
- ***Gardenia jasminoides*:** Fruit used as a natural yellow food colouring and anti-inflammatory agent.

[image right: *Gardenia jasminoides Ellis* fruit]


At Kajiya Farm, this same thinking was applied commercially, particularly through edible flowers and herbs used for plating, teas, and flavour infusions. At the Ohara farmers market, it appeared in more domestic forms — teas, pickles, leafy greens, and preserved vegetables.

[image below: Ohara mountainside farmland]

# - Produce & Varieties -

Midori Farm reinforced many themes seen at Kajiya Farm and the Ohara farmers market, particularly whole-plant use, seasonal eating, and acceptance of strong or bitter flavours.

Notable crops included:

- **Chinese cabbage**: blanched by tying up larger outer leaves to produce a sweeter white centre
- **Chrysanthemum greens**: planted with *Tagetes* and dill (*Anethum graveolens)* as companion plants
- **Mizuna:** intercropped with tomatoes (*Solanum lycopersicum*), aubergines (*Solanum melongena*), and garlic chives (*Allium tuberosum*)
- **Daikon radish:** valued for its versatility - tips for stews, mid-sections for sautéing, tops for salads
- **Shiso**: rare & protected red species.
- **Negi green onions (*Allium fistulosum*):** harvested repeatedly and divided for replanting
- **Sweet potato:** cured carefully at 70% humidity and 26℃, then bring the humidity down for a week. This will increase sweetness, and storage life extends to 3 months
- **Multiple squash varieties:** including kabocha, panipan, Waltham butternut, and kolinkey


[images above: Chinese cabbage at the farmers market, panipan squash, “red heart radish” seed pack from garden centre]

Key Observations on Produce:

- Many crops are grown and sold with **seasonal restraint**, appearing only when conditions are right rather than being forced year-round
- **Whole-plant utilisation** is common, particularly with root crops and perennials
- Bitter, aromatic, and medicinal flavours are widely accepted and valued
- Heirloom and protected varieties are actively maintained through local growing restrictions rather than seed banks

## - Ornamental Observations -

Alongside farms and food production, visits to ornamental gardens offered an important counterpoint, showing how the same philosophies of **observation, restraint, and cooperation with nature** are expressed through garden design too. The gardens visited as part of this tour can be defined into four catagories; **Tea Gardens**, which are the gadrens that lead the guests to the tea house where the traditional tea ceremony takes place; **Stroll Gardens**, which are a much more grand space usually taking guests on a path/journey around a central pond; **Courtyard Gardens**, which are designed in smaller spaces usually in and around temples and different architectural buildings; And **Dry Gardens, known as "Karesansui"** are more conceptual, contemplative spaces where the raked gravel, stones and moss islands represent abstract takes on different natural landscapes.

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[image left: Murin-an view from upstairs viewing room]

**Murin-an Garden** - This relatively modern garden represented a cultural shift away from highly formalised gardens to a more naturalistic style that evoked mountain villages, flowing water, and pastoral scenery. Murin-an is deeply rooted in the concept of **shakkei (borrowed landscape)**. The surrounding Higashiyama Mountains are not framed as distant scenery but actively incorporated into the garden's composition, between cultivated space and the wider environment. The stream, fed by water from Lake Biwa, appears to rush naturally down from the mountains, despite being carefully engineered. Similarly, the expansive grass lawns - unusual in traditional Japanese gardens - create a sense of openness and light, contributing to an illusion of vastness while quietly **supporting biodiversity**. Flora surveys had been taken to document the wildflowers growing within these lawns.

Maintenance at Murin-an is done using the principle of "muzōsa no geijutsu" - the art of artlessness - meaning that although the garden captures a perfect "natural" scene, it should be as if the gardeners do not set foot there. Daily early-morning tidying, **seasonal observation,** and selective intervention allow the garden to evolve rather than remain frozen in time. Adaptations to climate change, such as choosing broader-leaved maples to cope with hotter summers, echo the flexibility seen at farms. In both contexts, tradition is respected but not necessarily unchangeable.

[image right: Flora discovered in the Murin-an flora biodiversity survey]

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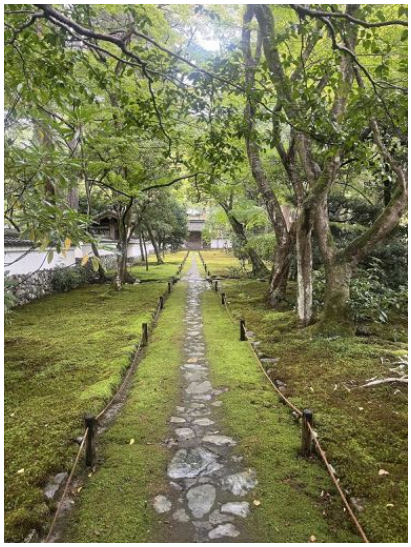
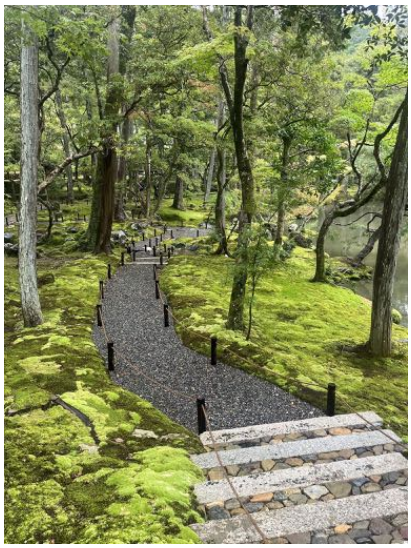
**Saihō-ji (Kokedera)** - The moss temple offered a very different but equally powerful expression of **working with nature**. Access to the garden is strictly limited and by appointment only, a deliberate act of restraint that shows both the fragility of the site and the value placed on **care over consumption**.



[images above from left: moss-covered pathway no longer allows guests to walk to allow the moss to encroach on the path; example of lichen on an Acer trunk; moss woodland stroll garden]

The experience begins not in the garden itself, but in the main hall, where visitors participate in shakyo (sutra copying). This Buddhist ritual acts as **a mindful moment**, slowing the body and preparing the mind for the meditative space beyond.


[images above from left: very deliberate exposed root through path; example of textures/colours of the moss; moss-covered islands in the central pond - so Princess Mononoke!]

The lower garden is said to contain over **120 species of moss and lichen**. Moss is highly valued in Japanese garden culture for both its fragility and its ability to alter perception, shifting your attention away from large human scale towards the tiny that can be so easily overlooked. Moss's practical qualities are just as important: moss **absorbs**

**moisture, dampens sound, and thrives in Japan's humid climate**, contributing to the deep stillness of the space. The ground surface is richly textured, fading through shades of bright green to near black. Seeing this garden raised important considerations for UK contexts, where lower humidity and periods of drought would require thoughtful shade creation, irrigation, and microclimate management if moss were to be used in a meaningful way.

The philosophy of care at Saihō-ji was articulated particularly clearly through the techniques of head gardener **Miyazaki Koji**. His approach is calm, deliberate, and deeply observational. Each day begins with walking the entire garden, allowing even the smallest changes to guide decisions. Moss care focuses on maintaining adequate light and moisture, with seasonality dictating intervention: fallen leaves are removed in summer, while winter is a period of rest, avoiding broom work altogether. When cleaning is required, old-fashioned bamboo brooms are used instead of leaf blowers, emphasising **mindfulness and physical connection to the garden**. Even the tools are grown on site, reinforcing the closed-loop relationship between landscape and maintenance.

[image left: Example of moss care tools; bamboo rakes of varying sizes]

Miyazaki teaches that perfection is temporary. Rather than striving for a fixed ideal, the garden embraces change - fallen leaves, exposed roots, weather damage - as all part of its meaning.

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**Ryōan-ji Temple** - This UNESCO World Heritage Site provided a different view from the more lush gardens visited during the trip. The garden is internationally recognised as the ultimate example of **"karesansui", or dry landscape design**. Composed of fifteen stones arranged in five groupings within a field of raked white gravel, it strips the garden back to its **most minimal elements**, removing plant life almost entirely (bar a small amount of moss at the base of the stones) and presenting nature in a highly abstract way. Throughout the trip, Japanese gardens consistently emphasised the importance of **space, or "ma"**- whether through the careful spacing of branches on a pruned pine or, in this case, through the deliberate absence of vegetation.

[images from left: Ryōan-ji karesansui; An example of a nawaki pruned pine at Kosho-ji Temple]

Despite the lack of obvious movement, the **garden remains dynamic**. The surrounding clay walls - finished using an oil-boiling technique - frame the space while allowing glimpses of the outside world. Branches of a weeping cherry and other deciduous trees rise beyond the walls, dropping leaves and petals into the scene, showing signs of the passage of seasons. Shadows cast by the stones stretch and rotate with the movement of the sun, subtly animating

the otherwise fixed composition. Although technically outside the garden boundary, these elements contribute to the overall experience, acting as another form of shakkei (borrowed landscape).

Beyond the dry garden itself, the wider temple grounds offered insight into Japanese pruning traditions, particularly through examples of **“Daisugi” pruning** on *Cryptomeria japonica*.



[images above: examples of “Daisugi” pruning at the temple grounds at Ryoan-ji]

This formative technique, a specialised form of **coppicing unique to the Kyoto region**, reflects the close relationship between forestry, craftsmanship, and garden design. Trees are coppiced at knee height in winter, leaving a single whorl of branches from which new vertical shoots emerge. Over time, selected trunks are retained and shaped into clean, evenly spaced forms, historically used for timber production. Seeing this technique applied within a temple, ornamental setting reinforced how productive and aesthetic landscapes are deeply intertwined in Japanese culture.

# - Conclusions -

Japanese agriculture, at its most thoughtful, is built on **observation, restraint, and integration** rather than control. Across Kajiya Farm, Midori Farm, farmers markets, and distribution networks, there was a consistent respect for seasonality, ecology, and cultural context.

Kajiya Farm showed how aesthetic crops such as edible flowers can anchor a viable business when paired with **precise working systems** that have been refined over years of practice and learning, but also the importance of keeping strong relationships with your consumers. Small, consistent actions — frequent sowing, seasonal flexibility, integrated livestock, and careful crop selection all create resilience and economic viability. Edible flowers and herbs are treated not as novelty but as serious crops with multiple applications across food, drink, and health.

Midori Farm highlighted the urgency of creating opportunities for new farmers and the importance of **blending tradition with modern tools** to tackle climate change and labour shortages.

Farmers markets revealed how deeply food and medicine are embedded in everyday life, while suppliers like On-The-Slope demonstrated that sustainable farming is more successful when supported by equally **thoughtful market systems.**

Overall, the trip reinforced that **resilient food systems** are not built through scale or uniformity, but through **diversity, adaptability, and long-term thinking** - these are valuable lessons for any horticulturist to take away.

The gardens (both productive and ornamental) covered in this report shared a common philosophy rooted in **attentiveness, restraint, and long-term stewardship**, where design is not a fixed outcome but an evolving relationship shaped by time, climate, and careful human intervention.

[images above from left: Jakko-in; Sanzen-in; Chuck with huge banana spider; organic pest control unit; Tofuku-ji; Sanzen-in]

# - Itinerary -

| Date | Activity |
|---|---|
| 25/10 | Travel to Osaka, Japan |
| 26/10 | Arrive at Kansai International Airport, Transfer to Kyoto |
| 27/10 | - Murin-an Garden (Stroll/Courtyard Garden) Guided tour & discussion with Michael Shipiro of Koto Landscaping)<br>- Tairyu-sansō Garden<br>- Tenjuan Temple Garden (Zen Garden)<br>- Heian Shrine Garden |
| 28/10 | **Uji Area**<br>- Mimurotoji Temple<br>- Kosho-ji<br>- Byodo-in |
| 29/10 | **Mihara Area**<br>- Kajiya Organic Farm (Guided tour with Yuzuru Kajiya, Head Grower) |
| 30/10 | - Takeda Garden for Medicinal Plant Conservation (Tour & discussion with horticulturist Noriko)<br>- Kinkaku Temple<br>- Roan-ji Temple (Dry Garden) |
| 31/10 | - Saiho-ji (Kokodera) Temple (Moss Garden)<br>- Joju-ji Temple<br>- Jizo-in Temple<br>- Matsunoo Taisha Shrine<br>- Katsura Imperial Villa |
| 1/11 | - Genko-an<br>- Koetsu-ji Temple<br>- Daisen-in Temple<br>- Hoshun-in Bonsai Garden<br>- Kyoto Botanical Gardens |
| 2/11 | - Farmers Market in Ohara<br>- Jakko-in Temple<br>- Shugakuin Imperial Villa<br>- Hosen-in<br>- Shorin-in Temple<br>- Sanzen-in Monzeki |
| 3/11 | - Kyoto Imperial Palace<br>- To-ji Temple<br>- Tofuku-ji<br>- Honbo Garden |
| 4/11 | - Midori Farm (Guided Tour & Hosted by Chuck Kayser, Organic Farmer & Educator) |
| 5/11 | **Nara Park**<br>- Isuien Garden (Guided tour & seminar with the Head Gardener, Sensei Makioka Kazuo)<br>- Yoshikien Garden<br>- Manyo Botanical Garden |
| 6/11 | **Okayama Area**<br>- Korakuen Garden |
| 7/11 | Return to UK |

## - Acknowledgements -

To Ella & Nadya for the many-a late night meeting getting this trip planned and ready, but also putting up with my excited tears whenever I saw something beautiful (which was often!). My sincere thanks to John Driscoll & Nir Halfon for writing such lovely references in support of this trip. I also thank you for the time, care and encouragement you've given me over the years. You have both made a great impact in inspiring my love of edible, productive growing and helped towards shaping my professional interests and aspirations. Finally, a huge thank you to the Merlin Trust, the RHS, Hardy Plant Society, Christopher Lloyd Bursary and Thistledown Horticultural Bursary - without your funding, the trip would never have happened.

## - Cost Breakdown -

| Category | Cost |
|---|---|
| Flights | £703.10 |
| Other Transport (Bus, Train, taxi etc) | £394.04 |
| Accomodation | £488.88 |
| Food/Drink | £333.53 |
| Other (Tour fees/Admissions etc.) | £384.45 |
| TOTAL | £2304.00 |

* Grants awarded to a group have been allocated on a pro rata per-person basis, with the total group award divided equally between three participants for reporting purposes.

| Bursary | Amount | Pro rata refund | % of Grant total | Pro rata cost assigned |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| RHS* | £1616.66 | £393.33 | 64.24% | £1480.05 |
| HPS* | £166.66 | £40.67 | 6.62% | £152.58 |
| Tresco* (Thistledown Horticultural Bursary) | £333.33 | £81.33 | 13.25% | £305.17 |
| Merlin Trust | £300 | £73 | 11.92% | £274.65 |
| Great Dixter* (Christopher Lloyd Bursary) | £100 | £24.33 | 3.97% | £91.55 |
| TOTAL Grants | £2516.67 | | 100% | |
| Personal Contribution | £400 | | | |
| TOTAL | £2916.67 | £612.67 | | £2304.00 |

We came in underbudget for the trip overall. We found the fairest way of returning these unspent funds to the organisations was to refund on a pro-rata basis, according to their grant percentage of total awarded funds. My personal contribution was fully applied and not subject to refund.