



Portland Classical Chinese Garden The Five Elements: PLANTS

Plants in the Chinese Garden Have Many Uses

Inside the Chinese Garden in Portland, Oregon there are many plants. Plants have many uses. Some are strong and can be used for building. Some are beautiful to watch grow in the sun. Some can be eaten as food. Also, the Chinese say that plants in nature can teach us many lessons.

Give 3-4 examples of ways that plants are used by people. Try to name different plants that are used in these ways.

The Chinese Garden's Plants Teach Lessons

Three plants—bamboo, pine and plum—welcome people to the Chinese Garden. The Chinese call them 'The Three Friends of Winter.' Why are they our friends? Like friends, they give us help and ideas when we need it. The Chinese say that bamboo can bend in the wind but not break and that is also a good idea for people to learn to do. Pine trees stay evergreen all year long, even in the cold and snow of winter. Pine tree teach us not give up and to be strong during hard times. Plum trees bravely send out small flowers on their bare branches at winter's end. Plum trees teach us to have courage.

Explain why the Chinese call bamboo, pine, and plum the Three Friends of Winter. Try to draw a picture of each of the Three Friends of Winter.

Plants in the Chinese Garden Tell Stories about China's History

There are banana trees growing in the garden. History books tell of many Chinese students who would write their characters (words) with a brush on banana leaves because they could not buy paper or silk. Banana leaves also helped students work hard while they painted and wrote. Rain would drum on the leaves and the wind would shake the leaves. The peaceful sounds of nature's music kept the students calm and while it focused their attention.

Explain why the banana tree has long been important to Chinese students.

Another tree in the Chinese garden is called a ginkgo. Ginkgo trees are one of the oldest plants to ever grow on earth. Ginkgos grew when dinosaurs roamed the earth around 200 million years. Ginkgo trees are called the ‘living fossils’ of China and the plant world.

Ginkgo leaves have long been drawn by artists in China. Try to find a photo of a ginkgo leaf and draw its special shape. Why are ginkgo trees called Living Fossils?

China is called the ‘Mother of All Gardens’

China has many different plant species. Nearly one out of every 8 different plants that grow around the world is found growing in China. In fact, more than 30,000 kinds of plants grow in China! Many different garden plants that grow in the United States started out as plants in China. Even plants that people think of as “all-American” such as roses were brought to the USA from China. The leaves of a special Chinese plant--*the Camellia sinensis*—are used to make tea. Chinese plants are very helpful to people across the whole world.

Explain how plants that are native to China are found in your life. Name the kind of Chinese plant used in brewing tea.

Challenge: If China has 30,000 different kinds of plants growing—that equals 1/8 of the all plants growing in the world—how many different kinds of plants can be found across the whole world?



‘The Three Friends of Winter’



Ginkgo



Camellia Senensis—Tea Plant



A Green Oasis in the City