

serenity grows from Simplicity

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Japanese Zen masters preach cultivating one's inner wisdom through the art of gardening. Let Zen—the creative expression of nature's simple beauty—help you create a peaceful sanctuary in your garden.



Ponder for a moment the beauty of a blossom. Focus on its exquisite form, letting everything else blur from view. Notice the bud, plump with promise, so like the rosebud lips of a sleeping baby. Watch closely as it slowly awakens with a luxurious yawn in the morning light, the way it faces the heavens for a day of glory in the sun. Now close your eyes. Touch the cool silkiness of the petals. Feel the texture of the foliage. Is it soft like velvet? Smooth as glass? Rough as sandpaper? Breathe in deeply. Let the bloom's delicate fragrance fill your soul with serenity.

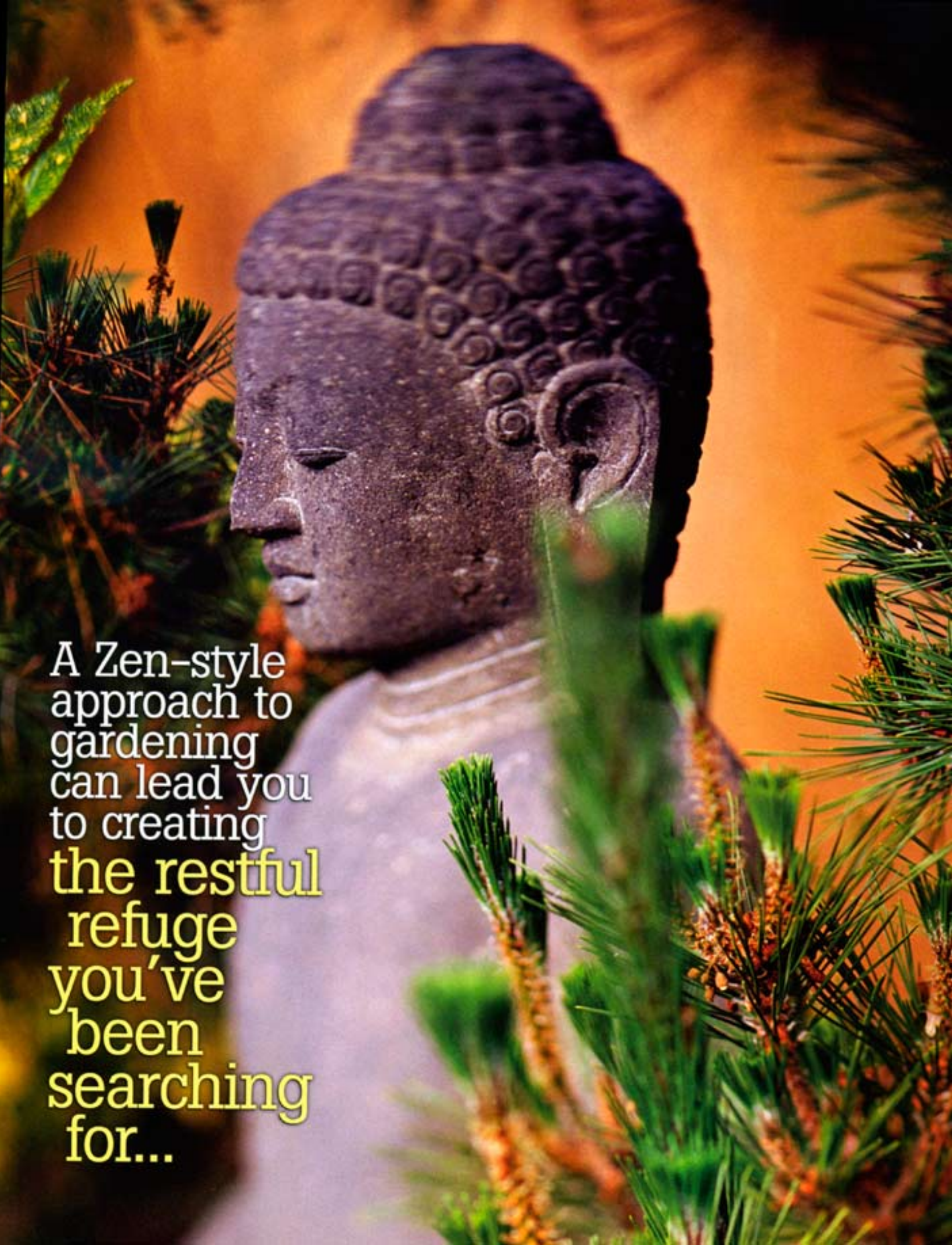
Just one flower possesses the power to stop a butterfly in flight. If a single bloom also captivates you, you've taken the first step on the path to discovering Zen, the ancient Japanese aesthetic of simplicity and reverence for nature. For centuries, Zen masters have meditated on the purity and perfection of the smallest earthly details—a petal, a dew-drop, a seed plume. Nature becomes the sole focus, opening the door to soul focus.

A Zen-style approach to gardening can lead you to creating the restful refuge you've been searching for, a sacred place that separates you from the rest of the world, where

ABOVE: A peaceful Zen garden is the perfect place for Alicia Lancashire to practice meditation and yoga in response to the stresses of the world.

OPPOSITE: A small wooden portal—called a humbling gate because one has to bow to pass through it—frames a narrow glimpse into the garden. Egyptian paper rush (*Cyperus papyrus*) and Kangaroo paw (*Anigozanthos 'Red Cross'*) line the entry.

PAGES 70–71: Stone etchings, a carved Buddha, and a prayer bell add authentic Japanese touches to the Zen garden.

A close-up photograph of a stone Buddha statue, likely made of dark grey or black stone, shown in profile facing left. The statue has a serene expression with closed eyes and a slight smile. Its hair is styled in a traditional topknot (ushnisha) with intricate, circular patterns. The statue is partially framed by the dark green, needle-covered branches of a pine tree. The background is a soft, warm orange glow, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

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A traditional Japanese garden scene. In the foreground, a large, flat, light-colored stone sits on a bed of vibrant green moss. To the right, a dark stone lantern with a tiered top stands on a small base. A red maple tree with dense, feathery foliage is the central focus, its branches extending over a small stream bed filled with smooth, light-colored stones. In the background, tall, thin green plants and more rocks are visible, creating a sense of depth and tranquility.

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Six Steps to Inner Peace

Contemplation, prayer, reflection—whatever name we give it, we all look for a way to escape the world for a while to search for inner strength and wisdom. In Zen, meditation is the path to personal enlightenment. It takes the focus away from things that cause stress, freeing up energy to be used more creatively. Meditation is a discipline that requires conscious effort. You can ease into a relaxing, Zen-like zone with this simple meditation exercise.

■ Sit comfortably on a cushion or chair. (Contrary to popular belief, it's not necessary to sit cross-legged on the floor.) Maintain good posture by keeping your spine straight, not rigid. Relax your neck and shoulder muscles, letting your arms rest at your sides or on your lap.

■ Close your eyes and "look" at the neutral screen behind your eyelids. Soften the muscles of your brow. Imagine your mind as a clear blue sky. Allow clouds of thought to drift by and disappear.

■ Remember to breathe. This may sound like a no-brainer, but it's not. Sedentary lifestyles cause shallow breathing, and stress or pain can make us

virtually hold our breath at times. Take deep, cleansing breaths through your nose, filling your lungs each time while expanding your solar plexus. Release air slowly through your mouth.

■ Turn consciously inward to the tranquil place deep within you. It may take practice and patience to reach this inner realm, called the still point in Zen. Once you're there, you may experience a floating sensation, or *samadhi*, the "falling away" of body and mind. Go with it. Enjoy it!

■ Meditate daily, at the same time each day, for 10–20 minutes. Many people find that an early morning ritual is best, when they're still relaxed from sleeping. Starting the day this way also jump-starts your power for creative thinking.

■ Cultivate the art of mindfulness. Zen teaches us to live in the moment, to experience today to the fullest and not borrow tomorrow's troubles. By learning to let go of the details that build up and burden us, our vision expands so we are able to focus completely on one thing. With a clear head, we see the world as it is—full of wonder and beauty.



Dwarf bamboo (*Pleioblastus viridistriatus*)

OPPOSITE: This traditional Asian-style fountain was made from a rustic stone urn. A bamboo spout directs the water flow from a hidden pump. **PAGES 76–77:** Landscape designer Margie Grace utilized many Japanese design tips to create the illusion of space. Natural contouring exaggerates perspective by layering separate scenes that seamlessly flow together. Plants are repeated throughout as a unifying element.

It also provides a subtle backdrop for art objects—collected by the couple on their world travels—including a centuries-old carved statue of a benevolent Buddha that provided major inspiration for Alicia's garden design.

The garden's genesis is fitting, considering that art also inspired the original Japanese Zen gardens, which in essence were the animation of the unembellished yet elegant black brushstrokes in ancient scroll paintings depicting sacred landscapes. With spirituality at its heart, the simplicity of a Zen garden becomes a metaphor for a humble life, uncluttered and free of flourishes.

Zen teaches us that each one of us is like a flower. Along life's path, we encounter sunny days, storms, and winds of change. Strength grows in roots hidden deep within our grounding. At the peak of our season, we bloom, beautiful as that single, breath-taking garden blossom.

FOR A ZEN GARDEN PLAN, SEE PAGE 80. FOR RESOURCES, SEE PAGE 118.

A close-up photograph of water pouring from a bamboo spout onto a dark, textured log. The water is captured in motion, creating a blurred, dynamic effect as it falls. The background is filled with out-of-focus green foliage, suggesting a natural, forest-like setting. The lighting is soft and natural, highlighting the textures of the bamboo and the log.

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