

The Building of a Small Courtyard Garden (Tsuboniwa)

by Steve Wright

It all started after the build of the Gold Medal garden at Tatton Flower Show in 2013. It was decided after the show that, instead of storing them for an indefinite period of time, the nine bark screens that Joe Daly and I had built would be offered for sale to local JGS members. Three were purchased at breakdown by Sue and Alan Hemsley for their garden in Derbyshire and the following day Jean Sharman got in touch enquiring if she could



Site for garden - Front entrance

purchase the remaining six panels. A few days later, Jean took me to where she wanted to use them: a bare plot of land 3 metres by 8 metres between her daughter's house and the neighbouring property. Jean thought that the panels fixed against the neighbour's wall would make a perfect back-drop for a Japanese Garden and happily, with the addition of seven 10 centimetre posts, the six panels covered the wall exactly.

To my surprise Jean then asked whether I would be willing to design and build a Japanese courtyard garden. This posed a few questions – for example, as to whether I could commit the time on my own and, if not, who could

I get to help. Fortunately, over the last few years in the North West, we have put together a little team, and if any of the team or anyone else requires help with their



Close-up of bark screens

gardening projects, we all help each other out. All were keen to help with this project and it was agreed with Jean that any payments for our labours would be donated to a



Close-up of bark screens

local Hospice. I also asked if some outside help would be available if necessary, and it was agreed with Jean that her builders would also assist us as and when required.

The design I came up with used traditional Japanese garden features: boulders, bark and willow screening, mounds of earth, 6mm granite gravel, stepping stones, a nobedan path and a limited number of plants. I drew the garden out and showed it to Jean – she liked the layout and agreed to it. I was concerned about the material costs and she immediately put me at ease saying "whatever you think is needed, just go ahead".



Close-up of bark screens

The first job was to sort the screening out and get permission from the neighbours to screw the support posts to their brick wall – the permission was granted. At one end of the plot was a good quality shed which serves as a screen and at the other end, which is the front entrance, is a feathered edge board fence with concrete posts. On the garden side of this fence we attached willow screening and topped it off with a small wooden roof.

The next project was to dig out the soil where the sea of granite gravel was to be placed. We then brought in a couple of tons of soil to get the mounds to the correct height. A couple of visits to CED Stone Products was



Building the nobedan path

then organised to obtain the boulders, stepping stones and beach cobbles - these beach cobbles being hand selected so as to find individual stones with a flattish face. Two broken granite kerb stones were found within the yard and, after checking the under face, we realized they were perfect to use in the nobedan path

When the boulders had been delivered, five of us (Billy Corcoran, Erick Oswald, Ioan Davies, Joe Daly, and myself) then set to work placing them. Five boulders went into the courtyard and we put three on the outside

next to the entrance. Although it never stopped raining, by the end of the day we had finished placing them, and a great time was had by all. Jean meanwhile kept us fed and watered!

Jean's builder was then drafted in to remove the flagged area where the nobedan path, along with a number of stepping stones, would eventually be placed. It was decided as to where the nobedan path was to go and the



Building the nobedan path

area was dug out for the granite kerb stones which were then set in position. Joe and I then set the beach cobbles and one large stepping stone within the nobedan. Several days later we put a pyramid shaped fillet of cement in place. It is 8cm high and abuts where the gravel and soil meet. This fillet is set to the depth of the gravel and stops the soil washing into the gravel. The top

of this fillet was 3cm below the top level of the stepping stones and the nobedan so that they stand above the gravel sea.



Finished garden - Nobedan path

The planting consisted of two pines, one Nandina, one Pieris, two Azaleas, a Ligularia and a few Saxifraga stolonifera and the soil levels were finished to the top level of the fillet. Already, where the soil level hasn't been disturbed, a layer of moss is forming. Finally

Tsuboniwa.....continued

one ton of 6mm silver grey granite was barrowed in, so linking together the various elements, making the garden a whole.



Finished garden - Nobedan path

I would like to thank our client Jean for her patience over the time this project took, Tatton 2013 to Tatton 2015 - not too long for a small garden - and for her generous



Finished garden - planting

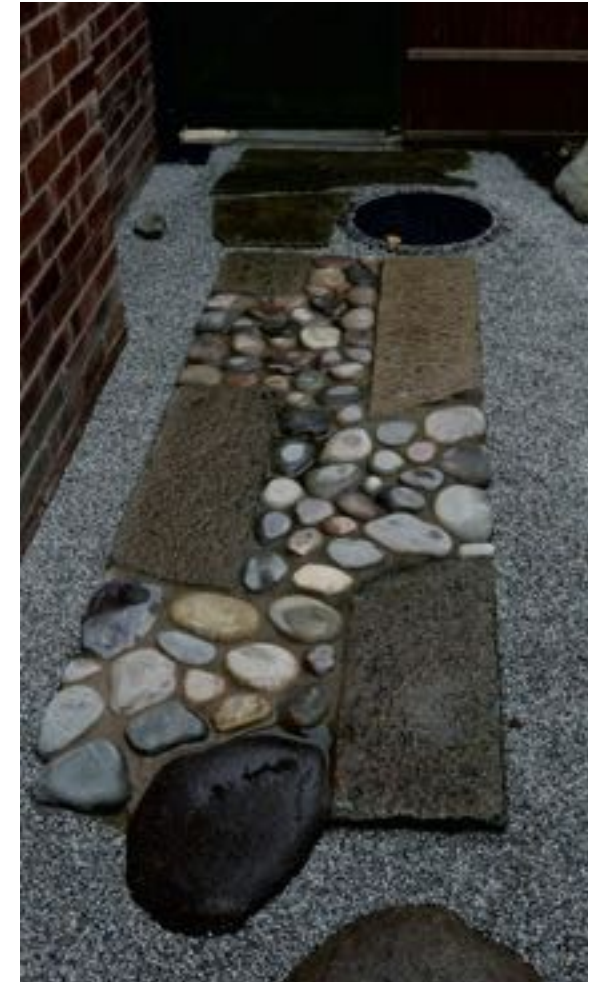
donation to her local Hospice. A rough estimate of the costs of materials used was £1,250.



Finished garden - Nobedan path



Entrance to garden - under construction



Nobedan Path photographed in October 2015 by Ray Hendy

