

# HETEROTOPIA GARDEN

## Ryoanji Temple

Source: <https://www.japanvisitor.com/japan-temples-shrines/ryoanji-temple>



In traditional Japanese gardening, gardens are thought to be an “うつし (Utsushi)” in which the “outside” scenery is compressed. “移 (move)”, “映 (reflect)”, “写 (copy)”, and “感染 (infect)” are all read “うつし (Utsushi)”. How were the various items comprising the garden “移 (moved)” to the house, and from where did they come? What do they “映 (reflect)” and “写 (copy)”, and how? The items came to the house from other places, serving as traces of various people, and containing different times. If you pay attention to these aspects, the garden becomes a heterotopia in which various times and spaces are juxtaposed.

Stories will emerge naturally.

## \*What is “Heterotopia”?

Heterotopia is a concept elaborated by philosopher Michel Foucault to describe certain cultural, institutional and discursive spaces that are somehow ‘other’: disturbing, intense, incompatible, contradictory or transforming. Heterotopias are worlds within worlds, mirroring and yet upsetting what is outside. Foucault provides examples: ships, cemeteries, bars, brothels, prisons, gardens of antiquity, fairs, Muslims baths and many more.

(Wikipedia)

## EXERCISE



Image credit: Port B

Make a “heterotopic” garden in your home, and share an image of it, perhaps with accompanying story, sound, music or poem with us and with your friends - in any way you like.

The garden need not be a garden in its literal sense: regarding its size, miniatures that fit in the corner of the living room or on a bedroom desk are equally perfect. You might create one new, or re-imagine one that already exists, such as a carpet (=garden). It can be simple or complex, abstract or concrete. It’s not a question of beauty or grandeur. The same goes for the stories: any content, format, and length is acceptable.

## SOME HINTS

(Following these is not mandatory)

1. The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible. Thus it is that the theater brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another; thus it is that the cinema is a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space, but perhaps the oldest example of these heterotopias that take the form of contradictory sites is the garden. We must not forget that in the Orient the garden, an astonishing creation that is now a thousand years old, had very deep and seemingly superimposed meanings. The traditional garden of the Persians was a sacred space that was supposed to bring together inside its rectangle four parts representing the four parts of the world, with a space still more sacred than the others that were like an umbilicus, the navel of the world at its center (the basin and water fountain were there); and all the vegetation of the garden was supposed to come together in this space, in this sort of microcosm. As for carpets, they were originally reproductions of gardens (the garden is a rug onto which the whole world comes to enact its symbolic perfection, and the rug is a sort of garden that can move across space). The garden is the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world. The garden has been a sort of happy, universalizing heterotopia since the beginnings of antiquity (our modern zoological gardens spring from that source).

Michel Foucault's "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias"



**The Ardabil Carpet, unknown,  
1539-1540, Iran.  
Museum no. 272-1893.**

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Source: <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/the-ardabil-carpet>

2. This garden making activity may help one pass the time and stay home. At the same time, it may serve as an exercise/game for those, who by locking themselves in their house have become too "immune" to the outside world, foreign substances, and others (viruses being the foremost example); to remember and reorganize their connection circuit to the "outside" so that they will not destroy themselves in isolation or get swallowed by hateful thoughts.

We hope that this activity will serve as a vaccination in a time where "感染 (to infect/be infected)" has become a prominent fear.