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Jennifer Aniston's Japanese-Inspired Garden Shows How to Create a Calm, Lush Retreat in Sloping Yards – It Starts With Layered Planting

From yucca to creeping juniper, experts break down the Japanese planting principles behind Jennifer Aniston's Bel Air garden – and how to get the look at home.



BY SARAH VELDMAN
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INFEATURES

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(Image credit: Alamy)

Jennifer Aniston's Bel Air home is one of the most envied properties in California. While the mid-century architecture designed by A. Quincy Jones deserves plenty of attention, it's the garden that seriously catches my eye.

The garden was created by the late landscape designer Marcello Villano, and it's a true masterclass in East-Meets-West gardening. It's restrained, layered, and serene in a way that feels so effortless yet is deeply purposeful, just as most everything in Japan.

[Japanese garden design](#) is seriously on trend in 2026, and Aniston's garden will forever stand out as the starting point. I spoke to a few experts to see how you, too, can get this look in your own garden, even if you're far from Japan in the US suburbs.

Article continues below

Japanese-Style Planting vs. Traditional Western Gardens

To really get an idea of what makes Aniston's garden so different from anything else we've seen, you need to understand what sets Japanese-style planting apart from the Western approach most of us are used to.

Mark McAteer, founder of fine landscape design and construction firm [The Laurel Group](#), draws a clear distinction. "Japanese garden style relies heavily on enclosure as part of the creation of a space, the feeling of which is one of simplicity and serenity. Minimalist gravel in a fluid pattern, a groundcover of moss (try this live moss, [available on Amazon](#)), selections of boulders, and a few plants are typical in the Japanese aesthetic. Color palette is minimal and narrow."

Western gardens, by contrast, tend toward the opposite. "Typical Western landscape designs stress openness, views for outsiders, complex foundation plantings and gardens with far more color," he says. "They often have a broader color palette, are far more complex in composition, and are more recreational and fun than restorative in feeling."

The Plants That Make Jennifer Aniston's Garden Work

Villano's planting scheme took inspiration from just a small palette of species, and each one was chosen for its architectural qualities as well as its year-round presence. [Yucca](#) gives a tall vertical look to the pool area, while creeping juniper, prostrate rosemary, and low-growing thyme all form a groundcover that gives the space a lovely, wavy quality. It feels as if you have just escaped to a zen, meditation, relaxing, peaceful, and any other synonym for a calm retreat in Japan.

You can start with a small yucca plant, [available at Lowe's](#), in sets of 2 or 4. To give the garden height, Villano added [Japanese maple](#), ornamental cherries, and rhododendrons. These have the added benefit of seasonal interest without becoming overwhelming.

Anh Ly, CEO and designer at [Mim Concept](#), explains why this approach works so well. "Plants like yucca bring architectural tension, while creeping juniper, prostrate rosemary, and low thyme soften the edges and create that layered, settled look people associate with high-end landscapes."

She also points to a broader shift in why this style resonates so strongly right now: "I see this aesthetic resonating with homeowners for the same reason minimalist interiors do: people are [craving outdoor spaces that feel calm](#), intentional, and easier to live with."

Jen-Inspired Plant Palette



Yucca Excelsior



Coral Bark Japanese Maple Tree



Blue Rug Juniper



Yaku Prince Rhododendron



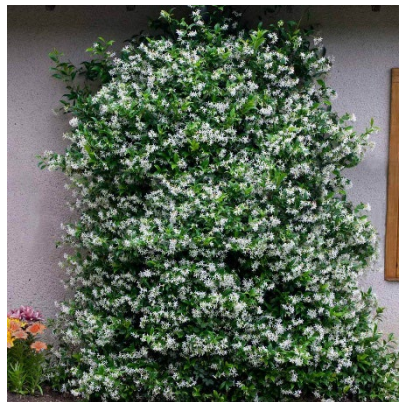
Red Creeping Thyme



Large Foxtail Agave Plant



Dwarf Mugo Pine Shrub



Star Jasmine



Black Mondo Grass

How to Recreate the Layered Structure in Any Backyard

A layered approach – tall structural plants, mid-level plants, and low groundcovers – is the technical foundation of the Japanese planting style, and you can easily achieve it, even in your own garden.

Nikki Bruner of [My Perfect Plants](#) recommends starting with the ground layer. "Evergreen groundcovers are especially effective because they create the base layer without adding clutter or overcrowding. One of my go-to recommendations is Blue Rug Juniper – it creates a beautiful cascading growth pattern that works well along edges or hills. Asiatic Jasmine is another good option for creating a dense groundcover look with year-round coverage." For the mid-level, she suggests spreading yew: "It adds a structural element that is unique while also staying compact and easy to maintain. These types of plants work together to create that layered, minimalist look, where everything feels intentional, but nothing feels overdone."

McAteer's advice for smaller spaces is the most useful takeaway of all: "A small backyard can be a garden jewel that takes the user away from everything that surrounds it." He tells me to consider things like:

- Japanese Forest Grass
- White flowering Mazus (as a groundcover)
- A few spherical items like Boxwoods
- A solitary sculptural tree like a Japanese White Pine
- A perimeter of Bamboo or organic fencing
- A terrace of gravel or stepping stones with moss joints.

He concludes, "Restrain your hand and your impulses to do more than using just a few items. When in doubt, do less."

If you live in a high-rise apartment and don't even have a balcony, but you still want the zen of a Japanese garden, try this Island Falls Home Store Zen Garden Kit ([available on Amazon](#)). Jennifer Aniston's garden works so cohesively because every choice is made in service of calm. That discipline is the real lesson, and it costs nothing to apply.



(Image credit: Digital-Fotofusion Gallery/Alamy Stock Photo/Alamy)



Sarah Veldman

Contributing Writer

Sarah is a lifestyle and entertainment writer with over a decade of experience covering everything from celebrity news to home and style trends. Her work has appeared in outlets including Bustle, The Everygirl, Hello Giggles, and Woman's Day. She also writes about the latest gardening news and emerging trends, from pollinator-friendly planting to small-space edible gardens and sustainable outdoor living. When she's not covering a viral moment, she's cultivating her own love of gardening and bringing a storyteller's eye to all things green and growing.