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Epiqueerean
BY JENNY NGUYEN

A Japanese Garden

I've started this Japanese garden project for my home and realized I've been craving and eating more and more Japanese food. Perhaps subconsciously I believe that through ingestion I can capture the tranquility and beauty that defines the traditional garden. Even if that weren't true at all, both my mind and body have been more at peace anyhow. Here are three gardens of eatin' that will surely enliven the Zen you crave.

Ukiyoe • 6516 N. Denver Ave.

Tired of all the hubbub and fanfare surrounding all the "good" sushi places about town? Relax and actually enjoy yourself at Ukiyoe, a nondescript restaurant at the corner of Rosa Parks and Denver. Looks can be deceiving, as I was expecting a much smaller, shadier shop upon entering. Two dining rooms filled with the aroma of sweet rice and sake instantly made me feel at home. The service is friendly, and the menu is grand; I've never seen a more prolific assortment of *makisushi* (sushi rolls). The *udon*, *katsu* and huge entrees of teriyaki are all worth trying, as are the scrumptious and light tempura-battered sweet potatoes. Go to enjoy great, reasonable Japanese food, without the flashy lights and tall tabs.

Biwa • 215 S.E. Ninth Ave.

Named after the largest lake in Japan, Biwa is located in the same building as Simpatica, the famously popular brunch/catering spot. From the succinct menu to the concrete floors, traditional meets atypical. Noodle bowls headline here, as they are everyday foods in Japan. Ramen, an egg noodle borrowed from China, is served in an immensely flavorful broth with meat. *Udon*, a thick rice noodle, is served in a broth made from dried fish flake and seaweed. *Yakitori*, or grilled food on a stick, is enlightening with beer or sake. *Kimchi*, an assortment of pickled vegetables, is one of many Korean-influenced foods that has landed on the Japanese table. Biwa is perfect for dispelling the notion that Japanese food and sushi are interchangeable. Like any ethnic cuisine, it is regional, traditional and multifaceted, and this restaurant has successfully represented itself as so.

Yakuza • 5411 N.E. 30th Ave.

Hungry hipsters rejoice! Named after the Japanese mafia, this restaurant is the antithesis of traditional Japanese. Garage doors open up to reveal a top-shelf full bar and long, thick wooden tables and booths. Huge, colorful murals line the rear of the cavernous restaurant, and just beyond that is another sushi bar/garage door combo that opens to a large outdoor garden eating area. Not a single Asian in sight, but the staff here are eye candy nonetheless. The drink menu begins with a Ginger Fizz and the dinner menu with pickles and aioli. Sound Japanese? Not really. But, for what it's worth, the sushi, drinks, service and atmosphere are outstanding. Besides, you're in Portland—Northeast for that matter—not Osaka. So "traditional" has gone out the window and expensive, delightful renditions of the real deal have found a home here, and I'm thankful. 10

JENNY NGUYEN will be admiring her handiwork in her garden. To contact her, write to epiqueerean@comcast.net.

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