Their Story...

Japanese immigrants came to the west coast of the United States in the late 1800s to make their fortunes. They believed this was a temporary sojourn and they would return to their homeland in Japan to live fruitful lives.

In the 1900s, they settled in places of great beauty like the Hood River Valley – places that reminded them of their homeland. They began to sink their roots into the ground, much like the trees they planted for the early orchardists. Soon they began raising families, and their ties to this valley became too strong to cut.

In spite of many hardships such as poverty, language barriers, social ostracism, and internment, they persevered. Through the hard work and determination of several generations, they have blossomed. Their perseverance bore great fruit in economic success, social acceptance and respect for their Japanese culture.

Further Reading:

The Japanese Heritage Garden: A feature of the Learning Garden built by the Central Gorge Master Gardener Association - This peaceful place, with its gentle vista of hills and orchards, honors the important role of the Japanese American community in the development of agriculture in the Hood River Valley. This site is particularly significant as it looks out upon lands which the Issei, the first generation Japanese settlers, were instrumental in developing.

Inspired by the amazing but little-known gardens created in the stark desolation of the World War II Japanese internment camps, this restful place represents the Hood River community's desire to recognize in a permanent and public way the grave injustice of the forced relocation of over 500 Japanese adults and their American citizen children from this valley from 1942 to 1946.

Little has been written about the significant role of gardens in the life of the internment camps where few outsiders were allowed and cameras forbidden. However, the spontaneous creation of both ornamental and edible gardens were expressions of ethnic identity and beauty that represented steps toward personal and community healing. For the gardeners the process offered an unusual measure of freedom in a constricted setting. The gardens allowed them to express their cultural values of hard work and the desire to improve their surroundings, values that the Hood River Japanese community has contributed so productively to the development of this valley for 100 years.

* "an acceptance of situations that cannot be controlled" - Shikata-ganai is often used to describe the ability of the Japanese people to maintain dignity in the face of an unavoidable tragedy or injustice, particularly when the circumstances are beyond their control.