

Tokyo

WEEKENDER

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TOKYO ECO

with Danielle Ripplingale

Sustainability...the Shinto Way: The Meiji-jingu Story



Spring is here and the country eagerly anticipates the arrival of the *sakura* (cherry) blossoms and *hanami* (flower-viewing) parties. It's the perfect time to get outside and visit Tokyo's own eco-wonder—Meiji Shrine.

People often assume that a city the size of Tokyo could be nothing more than a concrete jungle. However, the shrine forest of Meiji-jingu challenges this assumption with a forest encompassing 700,000 square meters. It offers a place of tranquility, recreation, and relaxation right in the center of Tokyo.

Since ancient times, the Japanese people have had a strong relationship with nature, believing that deities come down to earth from the tops of tall trees, and that their spirits dwell in plants, trees, water, stones, and other natural objects. Shinto shrines are built to offer respect to these deities and the sacred forests that surround these shrines are carefully protected.

The Meiji-Shrine forest project started more than 90 years ago when the citizens of Tokyo asked the government to build a Shinto shrine in Tokyo (rather than a grave) to commemorate the virtues of and offer veneration to the recently passed Emperor Meiji.

120,000 trees representing 365 different domestic species were donated by people from all over Japan and planted by 110,000 volunteers. Previously marshland, farms, and grassland, a shrine forest composed primarily of evergreen broadleaf trees such as oak and camphor was created.

The planners were painstaking in their consideration of creating a natural setting appropriate for the majestic shrine buildings. The gravel-strewn paths symbolize purification and the tree canopy towering above envelops visitors, creating a feeling of serenity. Created as the first 'eternal forest' in Japan, the planners decided that it must regenerate itself without human intervention and that the dominant trees should be adapted to the climate and the soil type, resistant to smoke pollution (from steam trains of the then-new and nearby Yamanote Line), and able to grow naturally without maintenance (no fruit or colorful flower-bearing trees or bushes).

Urban forests are essential environments to humans and bird wildlife as they provide at least 30 times more surface area than the same area of grass and significantly promote water conservation and air quality while reducing noise pollution and energy consumption.

Enjoy your next visit to Meiji-jingu with this new appreciation.

For the Kids! Eco-balls

Made for kids, not by kids.

Each of these fair-trade soccer balls deliver a powerful message: 'Save the Earth,' 'No More War,' or 'I'm Only One.' Made in Pakistan by people with physical and mental challenges, \$1 from each ball sold goes towards child education and elimination of child labor. Made by Idea Root and available at Idea Frames (www.idea-in.com) ¥5,000.



Eco-fact

Trees are the most affordable and effective remover of excess CO₂, with a large tree absorbing 13lbs of CO₂ alone from the air each year (not to mention other air pollutants).



GREEN GLOSSARY

Permaculture (permanent + agriculture) is based on the diversity, stability, and resilience of natural ecosystems and is the harmonious integration and design of landscape and communities in order to provide food, energy, and shelter in a way that is sustainable.