



Tree/Shrub of the month:

Stewartia pseudocamellia — flowers late May to June and with good autumn colour and flaking grey bark with an ultimate height of up to 20m. They need a sheltered position with acid to neutral moist but well drained soil.



Tree work in Japan

In April I went to Japan to work with Kotaro Koike, who I met on a previous visit to the Kyoto region in 2014. He has a tree surgery business in the Japanese alps in Chino, Neman prefecture near Matsumoto. I went to see how the Japanese work and look at niwaki (garden trees) again. The area is surrounded by high snow covered alpine peaks of around 3000m. The weather was warm during the day but quickly became a lot cooler by late afternoon, the cherry blossom (sakura) was at its peak so the snow of the mountains almost seemed to be drifting into the cities, it was amazing.

I stayed in their company dormitory (a bungalow in the suburbs of Chino) and lived with the other workers and got a real feel of what living in Japan was like. Eating local food (lots of miso soup, sticky rice, green tea and tamagoyaki—Japanese omelette) and experiencing daily life was something I really enjoyed.



We pruned inutsuge (*Ilex crenata*), katusra (*Cercidphyllum japonicum*), tsubaki (*Camellia japonica*) and yamasutsuji (*Rhododendron kampferi*) in the suburbs of Chino which involved much talking and bowing to the client before work started and after it finished—the Japanese are so polite and cheerful, always ready to chat.



The native trees are different to the UK, Japanese zelkova called keyaki (*Zelkova serrata*), dogwood called yamaboshi

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(*Cornus kousa*), and magnolia called kobushi (*Magnolia kobus*) seem to make up a lot of the tree cover on the hillsides along with Japanese red pine called akamatsu (*Pinus densiflora*), Japanese cedar known as sugi (*Cryptomeria japonica*) and chabohiba or Hinoki cypress (*Chamaecyparis obtusa*). Forestry is very important—most buildings are wooden—as I saw when Kotaro took me on a trip up into the mountains. While we were there we saw kobushi (*Magnolia kobus*), wild magnolia, in flower.



area of high biological activity with an increase in diversity of fungal organisms and enzyme activity.

Japanese pruning involves shaping the tree into a form that mimics the natural form of trees on the mountain sides and brings the miniaturized natural form into the garden often with rocks and gravel to represent the important Shinto elements of nature. While I was in the alpine region I could see how the natural landscape of trees, rocks and water in the mountains influences what was to be seen in gardens in town houses and villages nearby. I was also impressed to see some great niwaki in office and business areas, something which we could do in the UK in business parks and industrial units where space is limited. Wherever I went there always seemed to be so many interesting trees to look at along with the rice fields that were always nearby, even in built up areas, it was easy to feel the close association between people, land and nature.



I was also impressed with the relaxed attitude to trees near buildings!

The work carried out while I was there was varied—shrub pruning; working on large trees; removing dead wood; an emergency job using a crane to take down a split tree and soil decompaction. Familiar work but with a Japanese twist. An old Japanese red pine (*Pinus densiflora*) with sparse foliage and dieback had charcoal and sand mixed into the soil using hand tools and a later addition of mycorrhizae (beneficial fungi) to encourage better nutrient uptake. The tree had been collected many years ago from a mountainside by a family member of the client and so had special importance for them. In the UK it is more likely to have been mulched with woodchip. Glynn Percival has been researching mulches and finds it creates an

