

Tokyo in All Its Greenery



Dr. Jared Braiterman strolls along the public path installed alongside Shinjuku Gyoen.

MASATOSHI SAKAMOTO

Dr. Jared Braiterman, visiting lecturer at the University of Tokyo, has been sharing snapshots of parks, gardens and other bits of greenery around Tokyo with people all over the world via his blog “Tokyo Green Space” since 2009. *The Japan Journal’s* Osamu Sawaji went to talk to him.

Why did you start Tokyo Green Space?

Dr. Jared Braiterman: To begin with, when I came over to Japan in 2008 from the United States, I kept wondering how people managed to interact with nature in a massively

crowded city like Tokyo. Unexpectedly however, I found that there are actually a lot of plants and nature around the city. I was particularly fascinated by people gardening in extremely small spaces. In that respect, I think the people of Tokyo are really creative. You often see people growing plants on their apartment balconies, or planting flowers in pots on the sidewalk in front of shops. I once saw some ivy in a plastic bottle in the men’s lavatory at a subway station. That really blew me away. Things like that are proof that Tokyo really is a safe city.

I started the blog because I wanted to share new insights into Tokyo like that with as many people as possible.



Ivy in a plastic bottle in the men’s lavatory at a subway station

COURTESY OF DR. JARED BRAITERMAN

What has the response to your blog been like?

People in other countries tend to think that everywhere in Tokyo is swarming with people, like the famous crossing in Shibuya. So I've had lots of comments from people who are amazed at how much greenery there is in the city. I've had quite a few inquiries from

overseas too, and requests for articles or talks. People in other countries are genuinely interested in how people in a huge city like Tokyo interact with nature.

Unfortunately, Tokyo has seen a lot of its rivers being filled in to make way for road construction since the 1960s. There are far too many buildings in the city these days too. It would be virtually impossible to create a large park nowadays. Even so, public bodies are making an effort to increase greenery. Last year for instance, a lot of work was done on the space alongside Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden. There is now a tree-lined public path and even a small stream, echoing the waterways that used to run through Tokyo during the Edo period (1603–1867). Suginami Ward meanwhile has been growing an enormous 20-meter tall “green curtain” in front of its city offices for four years now, using plants such as luffa vines and morning glory to cover the entire building. More and more local residents are starting to grow their own green curtains as a result.



COURTESY OF DR. JARED BRAITERMAN

Biwa tree at the shrine in Kichijoji

You are also part of the “Tokyo Local Fruits” movement. What sort of activities does that involve?

The aim of Tokyo Local Fruits is not to increase sales but to get people more interested in the types of fruit that you can grow here in Tokyo. According to an online survey, people are growing over 30 different types of fruit in their gardens, on balconies and in parks around Tokyo, including *kaki* (persimmon), *yuzu*, satsumas, chestnuts and ginkgo berries, and eating them with their friends, families and neighbors.

In June this year, a couple of friends and I got permission from the local authorities to harvest *hassaku* oranges at an elementary school that had been closed down. We even

held a marmalade-making event. Around twenty people came along and had great fun making marmalade! Events like that make you appreciate how important food can be, in terms of developing relationships within the local community.

I'm convinced that Tokyo has the potential to become a more social, friendly and delicious place to live. Urbanization will progress more around the world. Experiments in growing plants in limited spaces, like in Tokyo, could really show the way forward for cities in Europe, the United States and developing countries.