

Yuichi's Garden

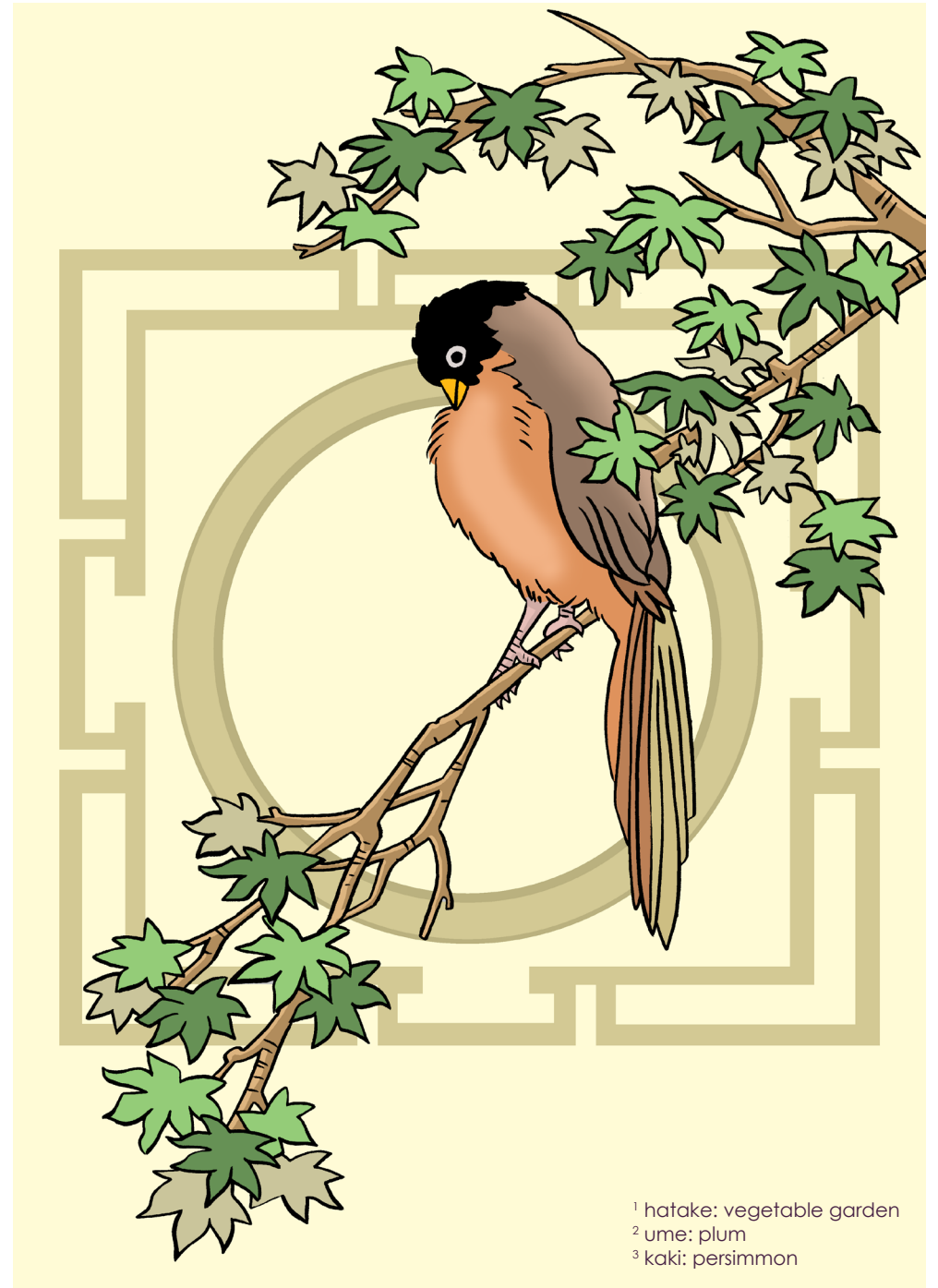
"Why, look at you!" Yuichi said, as he patted a bright orange baby pumpkin which looked like it had grown a few sizes since the night before. "You will grow into a large pumpkin like your brothers."

Yuichi smiled as he thought about all the many ways that Mother could prepare pumpkin. Pumpkin boiled and flavored with soy sauce, deep-fried pumpkin, and pumpkin in soup. Yuichi loved pumpkin!

He stood and stretched his arms. He was happy this morning. The *hatake*¹ was filled with ripening vegetables—bright red tomatoes, leafy greens, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, eggplant, potatoes, and cauliflower—all of these vegetables he had helped his father to plant. At the edge of the garden stood a beautiful *ume*² tree, with bark that looked black in the shadows. There was also a short *kaki*³ tree laden with small *kakis*; they still had a ways to go before they would be ripe and ready to eat.

As he looked around the garden, he noticed that the eggplant patch needed to be weeded. "Weeds must be removed while they're still small," Yuichi said, quoting his father's lesson on weeds. "Weeds that are allowed to grow rob the soil of nutrients that would otherwise be available to help the vegetables grow large and nutritious!"

Yuichi enjoyed caring for the vegetables in the *hatake*. He loved to see the vegetable shoots push their way through the ground, once the seeds had burrowed their way into the moist earth. Yuichi's favorite activity in the garden was harvesting the produce. His whole family would join together to pick tomatoes and vegetables that they gathered into large woven baskets. They would unearth the potatoes with a hoe. Yuichi thought it was like a treasure hunt, because they had to make sure that they found all the potatoes that had grown under the ground.



¹ hatake: vegetable garden

² ume: plum

³ kaki: persimmon

As he bent over and began pulling weeds from the eggplant patch, he heard someone call his name. He looked up and saw his friend Taku charging toward him brandishing a wooden sword. Taku was the son of a samurai.⁴

"Look at me!" Taku shouted. "Look at my sword!"

Yuichi admired Taku's new toy. "How nice! I wish I had something like that."

Taku laughed and hopped with delight. "Of course you do! Come, let's play together."

Yuichi looked at the eggplant patch that he had been weeding. The eggplants didn't seem as interesting as they had moments before. "I should do this first. The eggplants could suffer if I don't take good care of them."

Taku began to jab at imaginary foes with his wooden sword. "No one will know. Besides, why do you do that, anyway? Your mother could just as easily do it."

"I *like* gardening," said Yuichi, though he was feeling less and less sure of just how much. "But do you really feel like gardening right now?"



"Well ... I thought I did. ... Actually, I do feel like playing right now. Perhaps in a little while I will feel like gardening, and then I can get rid of these weeds."

Yuichi and Taku spent much of the day playing in the shallows of the river near the village. They climbed up to Pine Hill and spread their arms like soaring hawks. They filled their pockets with shiny rocks, and they playacted mock battles. Since Taku had the only sword, the victor was the same every time.

⁴ samurai: a Japanese warrior

"How was your day?" Yuichi's father asked as they had their evening meal of *shake*,⁵ pickled *daikon*,⁶ rice, and *miso*⁷ soup.

"I was playing with Taku," said Yuichi, suddenly feeling that perhaps it hadn't been the very best way to spend the entire day.

"I hope that was fun," said his father as he sipped from his *miso* bowl. "We have been blessed with beautiful summer days which are to be treasured."

After a few moments, Yuichi's father said with some concern, "Today I noticed that there were some weeds in the eggplant patch. You are usually very careful to make sure that no weeds grow there. But today, perhaps you did not see them?"

"Oh, Father, I did see them," said Yuichi, "but I didn't feel much like gardening this morning."

"You did such a good job helping Mother last year that we trusted you to watch the garden yourself this year. Our *hatake* is the reason we had the pickled vegetables and *ume* and dried *kaki* to eat, even throughout the winter months."

"I know," Yuichi whispered.

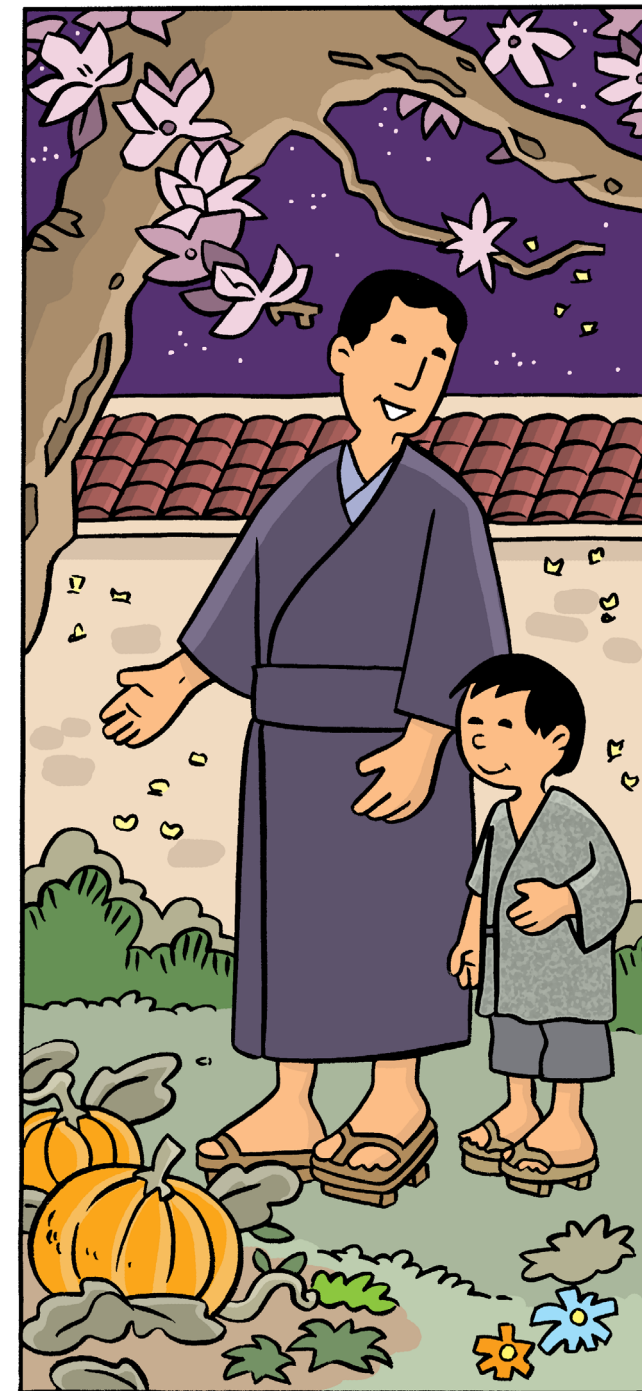
Father put his arm on Yuichi's shoulder, and his eyes sparkled. "After dinner, I will show you something."

Later, Yuichi and his father stood on the edges of the *hatake* as fireflies sparkled and other flying bugs buzzed about them.

"What do you think this is?" Yuichi's father asked as he pulled a pale flat seed from within his *yukata*⁸ and pressed it into Yuichi's hand.

"It is a pumpkin seed. It will be a pumpkin one day," Yuichi replied.

"Oh really? So if I leave this pumpkin seed here on the ground, and I come back for it in five months, will I find a pumpkin plant?"



⁵ shake: salmon

⁶ daikon: white radish

⁷ miso: soy bean

⁸ yukata: loose robe that is worn during the summer months

"Oh no, Father. If you leave it here, it will be eaten by birds or blown away by the wind. You need to plant it."

"So then, if I plant it and leave it alone after that, it will be alright?"

Yuichi laughed. "No, of course not! We have to water the seed and fertilize it, and then make sure that bugs don't eat the leaves, and also keep the weeds away."

"Well now, what a lot of work that is!" Father said with a smile. "How about we don't plant pumpkin seeds next year?"

"No pumpkin seeds!" cried Yuichi.

"And no eggplant seeds or tomato seeds or any seeds at all! It is so much work after all, and I want you to have fun and enjoy yourself."

"But then what will we eat throughout winter?"

"Perhaps we might plant our vegetables then?"

"By then it will be too late! There won't be enough sunlight, and it won't be warm enough for anything to grow."

"But wouldn't you rather play with Taku in the fields than care for the plants?"

Yuichi was quiet. He wished he had been able to see past his desire to only play that day.

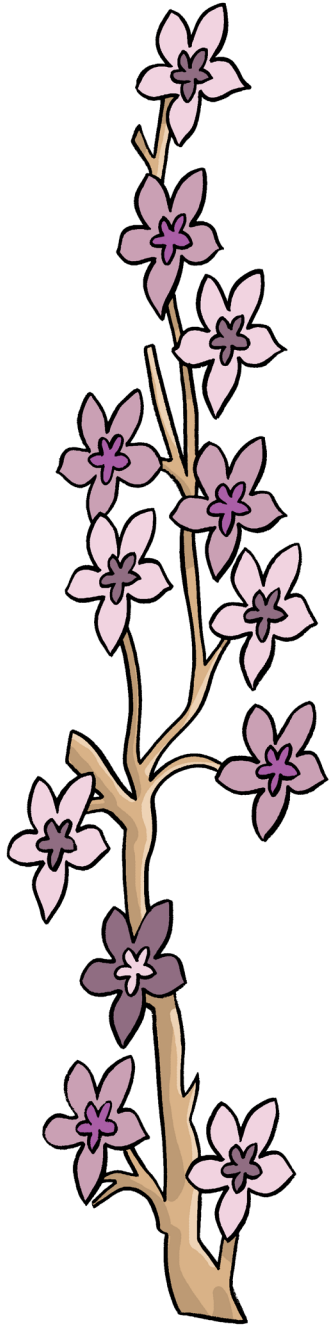
Father put his arm around Yuichi as they stared at the straight rows of tomatoes, eggplant, spinach, cauliflower, potatoes, and pumpkin in the light of the lanterns that hung outside their door.

"When we do only what we feel like doing, it is because we are thinking only about what might make us happy right now. But these things usually do not last past nightfall.

"Sometimes I am tired and I do not feel like casting my nets for fish, but when I think about you and your mother, then I'm happy to do it because I know that you will be happy, and my family will be well cared for."

The next morning, with the conversation from the night before firmly fixed in his heart, Yuichi hurriedly slipped on his *geta*,⁹ and went to the *hatake*.





"Today, I will clear all the bad weeds from around you," he said to the eggplants. His joy in the garden was restored. These were no longer just eggplants—these vegetables meant delicious foods all year round.

"Oi,¹⁰ Yuichi," a familiar voice cried. "I've come to play!"

"I'm sorry," said Yuichi, "but I can't go with you until later this afternoon. I must first rid my garden of these weeds." He was friendly but firm.

Taku was quite taken aback at Yuichi's solemn statement, and looked very puzzled. He sat down.

"Wouldn't you rather play all day, though?"

"Well, when I think about what would happen if I didn't take care of my plants, I would much rather take care of them now, and play later."

"That cannot possibly be any fun at all!" Taku said glumly.

"Actually," Yuichi said with a smile, "now that you mention it, I *am* enjoying myself. I'm thinking about how bright purple and fat these eggplants will look once they are fully ripe. And then Mother will grill them and they will taste so delicious! Mother will be pleased, and Father will be proud, and that makes me happy."

"Do you want to be a samurai like your father when you grow up?" Yuichi asked his friend.

"I don't know. When I feel like playing, I play, or I catch dragonflies. Other times, it is very pleasant to lie in bed and do nothing at all. I don't think much about the future."

"Well, you see, it's like my pumpkins. If I don't take care of them properly, they could get eaten by worms or bugs. I need to do my part so that they will grow big and strong. When I grow up I want to grow many more vegetables than just the ones I have here. But I need to learn what I can now, so that I'll be a good farmer when I'm older."

⁹ geta: wooden clogs

¹⁰ Oi: hey



There was a pause, then Taku slowly asked, "Do you think I could become a great samurai like my father?"

"I think so. You are very good with a sword, but you must train."

Taku's chest puffed up with pride, then he sighed. "But what should I do?"

"You probably won't be able to play as much as you like, but if you are faithful, one day you will be a great samurai. Just like if I am faithful to garden, I will be a good farmer and have many vegetables in my garden."

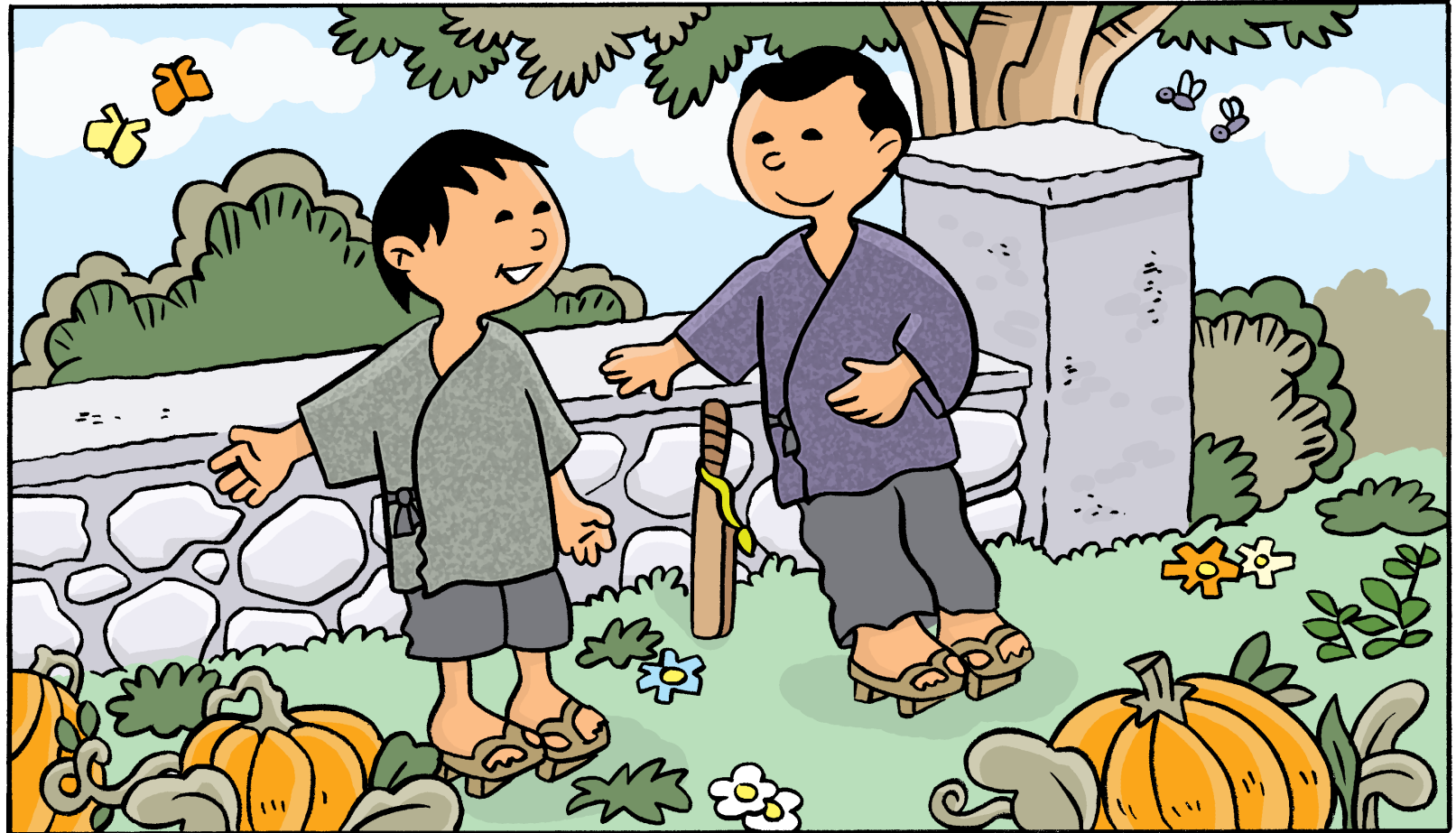
Taku watched as Yuichi continued to pull weeds. "W-would you like to use my sword to garden?" he asked.

Yuichi was about to refuse, when Taku quickly added, "You can use it as a shovel, or as a hoe. See?"

"Thank you! How nice! Would you like to play after I finish here?"

"Yes. And for now I think that I will go and talk with my father about things that I can learn so that I can be a samurai."

As Taku walked away, Yuichi imagined Taku as a great samurai with a horse and armor. Then he imagined all the many vegetables that he and his family would have from their harvest, and he smiled.



Accompanying activity: "'Yuichi's Garden' Diorama."



S&S link: Character Building:
Personal Responsibility: Perseverance-1a
Authored by T. M. Illustrated by Didier Martin.
Designed by Roy Evans.
Published by My Wonder Studio.
Copyright © 2020 by The Family International