

Morning Glories F4



*Charles E. Mace
Block 44, Jerome, 1944
Photo*

National Archives and Records Administration, ARC ID 539669

BACKGROUND

*Vines entwine
morning glory flowers
blooming between them
- Najin Nakao, Rohwer
May Sky (139)*

Many Japanese Americans who were sent to the Arkansas camps from California were farmers. Bob Mitori, a former Rohwer inmate, estimates that as many as seventy percent had backgrounds in agriculture. Mary Dakuzaku Tsukamoto, incarcerated at Jerome, grew up in a truck farming family that raised strawberries near Florin, California. She and her five siblings worked long hours in the fields alongside their parents, Taro and Kame.

Tsukamoto shares the story of her family in her memoir, *We the People*. In the evenings when dinner and hot Japanese baths were finished, her parents worked until dark in their vegetable garden which put food on the family's table. Kame, like all *Issei* farm wives, cooked, did the housework, cared for the children, and farmed as well. Still, she found time for raising a flower garden filled with larkspurs, poppies, marigolds, daisies, and roses. Tsukamoto explains that it was a peaceful place in her mom's demanding days.

Once settled into the life of the assembly centers and the relocation camps, these farm families put their skills to use. At Jerome and Rohwer, the Japanese American inmates dug ditches that drained the swampland and felled trees for firewood and to clear the land. This made it possible for them to grow food crops—cucumbers, corn, tomatoes, mustard greens, cabbage, and Jubilee watermelons. Like other American families, they planted victory gardens to show their support of the country that labeled them aliens and their children non-aliens even though they were U. S. citizens by birth.

Ruth Asawa’s family did not have a victory garden at Rohwer, but she remembers that her mother planted *daikon* seeds which she had brought with her from California. The *daikon* is a long, white radish that is popular with Japanese Americans. Asawa’s *Issei* father loved to explore the swamps around Rohwer and found a “poka” plant that he remembered from his days in Hawai’i before he came to the mainland. The plant produced a delicious green fruit with black seeds which he harvested and planted around the barracks.

Japanese Americans at the Arkansas camps also created rock gardens and ornamental gardens of boxwood, calla lilies, and daisies. Sunflowers and castor bean plants provided much-needed shade as did morning glory and gourd vines trained to climb string or twig trellises built over barrack walls and entrances. Poet Najin Nakao was inspired to write about the beauty of morning glory vines in his *haiku* that appears at the beginning of this lesson. The photo by War Relocation Authority photographer Charles Mace reflects the poet’s words.

Shōson (Kenneth Yasuda) became a friend of John Gould Fletcher and Charlie May Simon. His collection of poetry, which includes *haiku* he wrote while imprisoned at Jerome and Heart Mountain, is titled *A Pepper-Pod: A Haiku Sampler*. Fletcher wrote the foreword for the book in 1946. The following poem may have been written in response to a garden similar to the one that Mace photographed.

IRISES

*Irises on their stalks
Gently bend before the breeze,
Bordering the walks.*

ACTIVITY

The Japanese word for morning glories is *asagao* meaning “morning faces.” The beloved flower was cultivated at the assembly centers where inmates immediately created gardens that were documented by WRA photographer Dorothea Lange. Mary Tsukamoto writes of seeing the ugly black barracks at Fresno Assembly Center transformed by a cover of purple and white morning glories just as the barracks at Jerome and Rohwer would be transformed.

Origami is the Japanese art of folding paper. Create morning glory blossoms with white

or purple lightweight paper using instructions that can be found online at <http://s89015200.onlinehome.us/thepaperfold/mglory.htm> or <http://www.marubeni.com/shosha/origami60.html>. Add leaves made from green paper squares. Twist green bulletin board paper to make a vine and attach the blossoms to it. Drape the vine around a bulletin board or the chalk board. Irises were another popular flower in the Arkansas camps just as they are all over the state. Make yellow, white, or purple irises following instructions found online.

Fourth Grade Visual Arts Standards: A.1.2, A.1.3, A.1.7; A.2.4, A.2.5, A.2.6, A.2.7, A.2.8, A.2.9.

Fifth Grade Visual Arts Standards: A.1.7, A.1.8, A.1.9; A.1.2, A.2.5, A.2.7; A.3.4.