

Cherry Blossoms

Shining spring day

Falling cherry blossoms

~Kino Tomonari

For centuries, the Japanese have valued cherry tree blossoms, called sakura, for their brief flowering period at the beginning of spring. Their ephemeral nature commonly symbolizes passing beauty, as well as the essence of a human's short, but well-lived life.

Cherry blossom festivals are a special feature of Japanese life. The centuries-old custom is known as hanami, which means flower viewing. Traditional festival activities include playing games such as karuta, musical performances, painting, writing, and poetry. In modern times hanami events are popular social events with friends and family.



Color woodblock print - Tokyo nijukei, Ueno Kiyomizudo by Kawase Hasui, 1928

The flowering time of cherries, like most spring flowering plants, is dependent on a combination of the temperature and the length of the days and nights. Different types of cherries have distinct blooming times. Most cherry blossoms have 5 petals, but some have as many as 50. Bud and flower color ranges from red to pink to white. The majority of cherry trees growing at the Arboretum are ornamental and grown for their flower blossoms rather than for their fruit. They are native to several countries in Asia including Japan, China, Korea, and Taiwan.

A little history...

In the late 1800s, the Arnold Arboretum was responsible for some of the East Asian introductions of flowering cherries into North America. *Prunus sargentii* was first introduced to the Arboretum in 1890 by Dr. William S. Bigelow, who sent seeds from Japan. Two years later, in 1892, Charles S. Sargent (the first director of the Arnold Arboretum) also sent seeds back from his Japanese expedition.

Before these introductions, the diversity of flowering cherries available in the US was limited. There were several native flowering cherry trees, such as the *Prunus serotina* (black cherry) and *Prunus emarginata* (bitter cherry); however they were not as showy and exquisitely beautiful as the East Asian varieties.



April Flowers

Different cherry trees bloom at various times throughout the month, so visit often.

- ① Sargent cherry cultivar
Prunus sargentii 'Columnaris'
- ② Okame cherry
Prunus 'Okame'
- ③ European bird cherry
Prunus padus v. glauca
- ④ Higan cherry
Prunus subhirtella 'Pendula'
- ⑤ Yoshino cherry (like those found in Washington DC)
Prunus x yedoensis
- ⑥ Judd's cherry
Prunus x juddii

