

SPRING FESTIVAL

# Tickled pink by cherry blossoms

**Celebrate:**  
Grab a tarp  
and some  
friends  
to party  
under  
the trees



Steve Whysall

At the heart of the month-long Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival, which gets underway today, is the desire to bring people together.

This is really why it was started in the first place by Linda Poole back in 2006. She wanted to do something that would bring communities together, get people to stop and appreciate the beautiful blossoms and give us all a reason to come together to celebrate the joy of life for a moment.

In Japan, where all this appreciation of the delicate, transitory cherry blossom began, coming together to look at the flowers is called "hanami."

From the tip to the top of Japan from March to May, people party under the blossoming cherry trees. In most cases, they spread blue tarps on the ground to sit on. Some people find the tarps a bit ugly, but when the cherry blossoms sprinkle down in a breeze, the tarps are soon transformed into pretty tapestries.

Here in Vancouver, Poole would love to see more people spread a tarp or blanket under a cherry tree and have a picnic party.

"We always like the words of Japanese poet Kobayashi Issa: 'There is no stranger under the cherry tree,'" says Poole.

In Japan, the partying can go on all day and into the night when lanterns are hung in the trees to provide illumination.

Poole thinks there are plenty of beautiful, spreading cherry trees in parks and green spaces here in Metro Vancouver where people can have a fun hanami party.

However, the main goal of the festival is to get us all to stop and appreciate the beauty of cherry blossoms, especially their short-lived, ephemeral, transitory nature, and from all of this introspection it is hoped we will gain a fresh perspective on the important things in life.

To help, the festival has set up a great website ([www.vcbf.ca](http://www.vcbf.ca)) where all the best places to see cherry trees at peak bloom around the city are identified.

In Metro Vancouver, at least 45 varieties of ornamental cherry trees are planted throughout the city. At least 18,000 are planted as street trees along with almost as many ornamental plum trees.

But, in reality, the blossom party has already begun, since "Whitcomb" cherries, one of the first to bloom, began flowering way back in March and a few late-winter-flowering cherries started before that.

But April is the prime month. We will see the pink wave expand with the blooming of "Akebono" and "Acolade" trees along with "Okame," "Spire" and "Somei-Yoshino" cherries. Next comes "Umineko" and "Shirotae" along with "Pandora" and the Oshima cherry. By mid-April, there will be dozens more joining the party, from "Rancho," "Amanogawa" and "Takasago" to "Shogetsu," "Kiku-shidare" and "Shirofugen."



The Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival offers a great opportunity to enjoy the beauty of the spring season.

And by the end of April and on into May, the bulk of the cherry population will be in full bloom, including "Kwanzan," the most widely planted cherry tree in the city.

If you really want to get to know Japanese cherry trees better, pick up a copy of Ornamental Cherries in Vancouver, the festival's official guide. It is available from the Shop in the Garden at VanDusen Botanical Garden for \$25.

To kick things off, the festival holds its Cherry Jam today from noon to 1:30 at the Burrard SkyTrain station. This is a noisy, joyful affair with Japanese drumming and the reading of haiku poems.

The main event is the Sakura Days Japan Fair between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. April 5 and 6 at VanDusen Botanical Garden.

This is a two-day celebration of Japanese arts and culture, including everything from ikebana, origami and martial arts to taiko drumming, plein-air blossom painting and shakuhachi (bamboo flute) music.

There will also be sake tasting, tea ceremonies and a banquet of Japanese food to taste.

Other festival highlights include a Bollywood-style blossom dance performance on the steps of the Vancouver Art Gallery (April 12); Sakura Illumination (April 4), when light-artist Stuart Ward will light up trees in Sutcliffe Park near the entrance

to Granville Island with patterned video lights; and an invitation to Bike the Blossoms from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. through Velopalooza (promoters of fun bike rides in Vancouver) April 26.

For the botanically enthusiastic, there will be a talk April 10 from 7:30 to 9 p.m. in VanDusen's Visitor Centre by Doug Justice, of the University of B.C. Botanical Garden, on how to identify various cultivars of cherry tree.

Blossom view walks have been arranged to Queen Elizabeth Park, Strathcona, Coal Harbour, the West End and Stanley Park for April 3, 5, 6, 12, 13 and 20.

And if you feel moved by the beauty of the blossoms, you can put your thoughts into poetry and submit an entry into the festival's international haiku contest.

All you have to do is think up three lines, each containing 17 syllables, in a traditional 5-7-5 format, and you're done. Last year, Julie Emerson came up with the best B.C. entry: "A crow's nest/the wind drops/white blossoms."

Or you can enter the BC Blossom Watch Photo Contest by submitting your best cherry blossom photo to [bcblossomwatch@vcbf.ca](mailto:bcblossomwatch@vcbf.ca)

For complete details on all these activities and events, go to the festival website at [www.vcbf.ca](http://www.vcbf.ca)

[swhysall@vancouver.sun.com](mailto:swhysall@vancouver.sun.com)

## Events At a Glance

- Mar 1 to June 2:** Haiku invitational, online
- April 3:** Tree Talks & Walks, Downtown Coal Harbour in Mandarin, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
- April 3 to 28:** B.C. Blossom Watch, online
- April 4:** Sakura Illumination at Sutcliffe Park behind False Creek Community Centre, 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.
- April 5:** Tree Talks & Walks, West End and Stanley Park, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.
- April 5, 12, 19:** Plein Air Blossom Painting Classes, VanDusen Botanical Garden, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- April 5-6:** Sakura Days Japan Fair feature event at VanDusen Botanical Garden, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- April 6:** Tree Talks & Walks Oppenheimer Park, 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
- April 6:** Tree Talks & Walks VanDusen Botanical Garden, 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m.
- April 7:** World Green City Lecture at UBC Robson Square Theatre C300, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.
- April 10:** Blossom Biology, VanDusen Botanical Garden Classroom, 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.
- April 12:** Tree Talks & Walks, UBC, 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
- April 12:** Blossom Bollywood Dance on the Vancouver Art Gallery Plaza, 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.
- April 12:** Tree Talks & Walks, Stanley Park, 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.
- April 13:** Cherry Blossom Picnic with Tree Talks & Walks at Larry Berg Flight Path Park, Richmond, 11:30 a.m. to 2:45 p.m.
- April 13:** Tree Talks & Walks, Queen Elizabeth Park, 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m.
- April 20:** Tree Talks & Walks, 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m., stay tuned for meet-up location.
- April 26:** Bike the Blossoms, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., check [vcbf.ca](http://vcbf.ca) for meet-up location.

**"It's so much fun, it's contagious...it's outrageous"**  
—The Province

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Linda Poole says she launched the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival in 2006 to bring people together.