

Early bloom for some Metro Vancouver cherry blossoms

BY TIFFANY CRAWFORD, VANCOUVER SUN FEBRUARY 11, 2015

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Cherry blossoms have bloomed at the corner of Nelson and Bute in Vancouver, B.C., February 11, 2015. Photograph by: Arlen Redekop , PNG

METRO VANCOUVER - Some of Metro Vancouver's iconic ornamental cherry blossom trees are already blooming because of the warmer than normal temperatures so far this year.

The Whitcomb trees are flowering up to two weeks early, something the region hasn't seen since 2010 — the year of the Vancouver Olympics — and that makes Linda Poole, executive director of the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival a little nervous.

"My cherry scouts are saying our cherry blossoms are going to be out early," said Poole. "But you never know what Mother Nature will do. During the Olympics some came out in February but they then they all fell into line and behaved and bloomed properly in April. We figured it was just to welcome everyone."

The Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival, which is heading into its ninth year, kicks off April 2, and organizers are hoping that the blossoms won't already be falling on the ground by then.

"It's still beautiful. But in nine years we've been so lucky. We'll continue to celebrate no matter what happens," said Poole.

She said 10 degrees C is the threshold for the cherry blossoms, and that's when they start blooming, especially if it's sunny. According to Environment Canada, the temperatures are expected to hover around nine or 10 degrees C until Monday. Saturday and Sunday are forecast to be clear and sunny.

In Japan, they report on the percentage of bloom almost daily in the news, said Poole. "They take it seriously. But we are starting to see that. So many people are on social media posting photos of the blossoms."

For those who want to snap some early photos, Poole noted that the Sunset community has quite a few Whitcomb trees in bloom.

"The Whitcomb trees are not as showy as the ones up by Burrard SkyTrain station, but they are beautiful," she said.

Metro Vancouver has 50 different varieties of ornamental cherry trees that come into bloom, according to the festival's website, with flower colours ranging from light pink to snow white.

Arboriculture superintendent for the Vancouver park board Bill Stephen said the cherry blossoms are flowering between one and two weeks early, depending on the microclimate of the area, which is determined by sun exposure and distance from the ocean.

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