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Vancouver flower fest could be missing blooms

By David La Riviere
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Vancouver's cherry blossoms bloomed early and there may not be many left for the upcoming festival. (David La Riviere, 24 hours)

Vancouver's early spring has caused local cherry trees to bloom weeks ahead of schedule - causing concern for the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival.

The festival is an annual month-long celebration focused on admiring the blossoms produced by the city's 50 varieties of ornamental cherry trees. The festival has been running for nearly a decade, but Linda Poole, founding VCBF executive director, said this is the first year that the trees have bloomed this early before a festival. Cherry blossoms only last two weeks and that time is shortened after a heavy rainfall.

"It's just going to be a bit of a different festival," Poole said.

"That's why we need everybody to come out regardless of where the blossoms are at."

Festival events will happen on schedule with the exception of some walking and cycling neighbourhood tree tours and an event called Sakura Illumination. At the event, an artist uses cherry blossoms as a canvas for a patterned light display and it doesn't currently have a set location.

Poole added that some of the picnics planned to take place at the end of the month will likely be devoid of flowers.

"The flowers will probably be gone for some of our petal mat picnics, but the leaves come out right away and these emerging green spring leaves are pretty too. You can't count on the flowers always."

Douglas Justice, associate director of horticulture and collections at the UBC Botanical Garden, said that despite the early blooming, this year's cherry blossoms are some of the best.

"Why everybody is noticing this year rather than other years is that we had a very good summer last year, which kind of facilitated the development of good flower buds."

This year Vancouver's flowering trees are two weeks ahead of the usual blooming schedule. Justice said that the city's plum trees usually flower around the spring equinox, but started blooming this year in late February.

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