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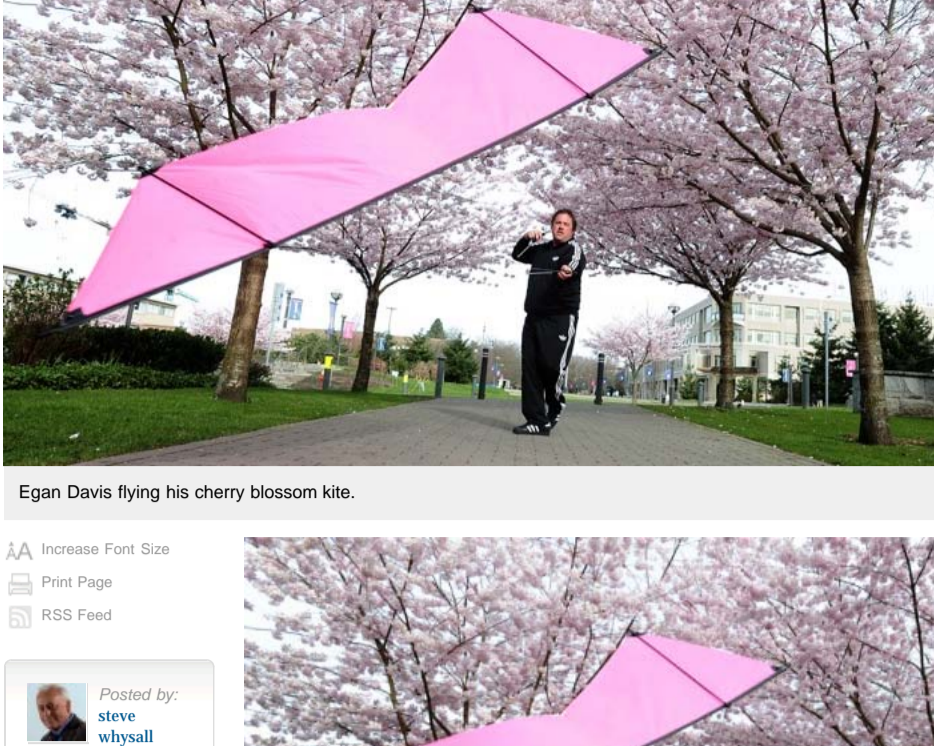
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IN THE GARDEN

Flying high into cherry blossom season

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Egan Davis flying his cherry blossom kite.

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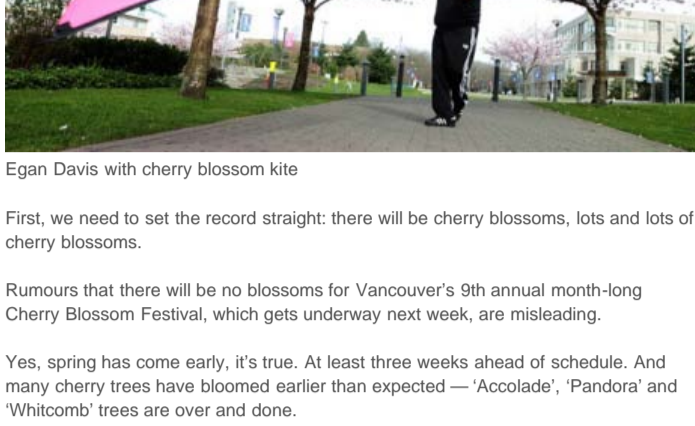
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Egan Davis with cherry blossom kite

First, we need to set the record straight: there will be cherry blossoms, lots and lots of cherry blossoms.

Rumours that there will be no blossoms for Vancouver's 9th annual month-long Cherry Blossom Festival, which gets underway next week, are misleading.

Yes, spring has come early, it's true. At least three weeks ahead of schedule. And many cherry trees have bloomed earlier than expected — 'Accolade', 'Pandora' and 'Whitcomb' trees are over and done.

But there are many, many more to come. Hey, we have at least 54 cultivars planted in Vancouver, so there'll be no shortage of blossoms.

'Akebono' is still blooming here and there, along with 'Yae-beni-shidare', 'Umineko', 'Shirotae' and 'Somei-yoshino'.



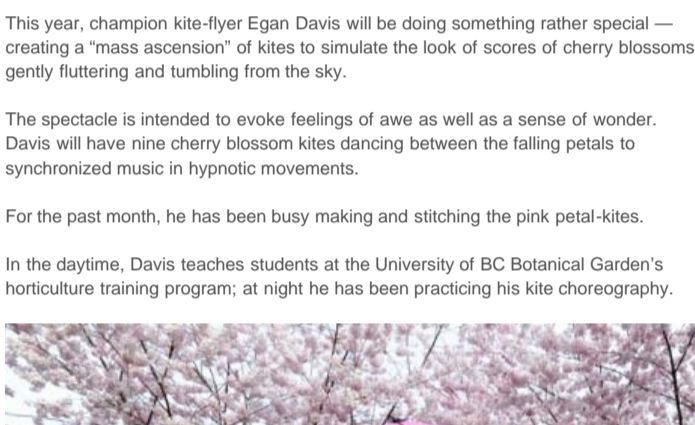
Egan Davis with cherry blossom kite

And dozens more, including scores of 'Kanzan,' the most extensively planted Japanese ornamental cherry tree on Vancouver streets, are still waiting to pop.

It's going to be a wonderful month of cherry blossoms, right through April and into May, have no fear.

But let's get back to the festival itself, which was just named the Festival of the Year by the Canadian Garden Council.

The whole idea of this event is to get us all to pause and appreciate the ethereal, ephemeral, delicate beauty of cherry blossoms ... and by so doing, to realize the importance of living in the moment and not taking life for granted.



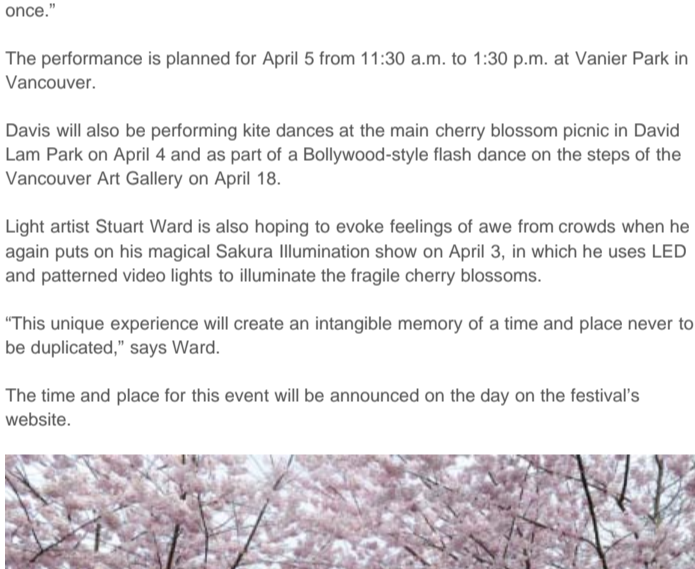
Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival, April 2 to 29

This year, champion kite-flyer Egan Davis will be doing something rather special — creating a "mass ascension" of kites to simulate the look of scores of cherry blossoms gently fluttering and tumbling from the sky.

The spectacle is intended to evoke feelings of awe as well as a sense of wonder. Davis will have nine cherry blossom kites dancing between the falling petals to synchronized music in hypnotic movements.

For the past month, he has been busy making and stitching the pink petal-kites.

In the daytime, Davis teaches students at the University of BC Botanical Garden's horticulture training program; at night he has been practicing his kite choreography.



Egan Davis flying his cherry blossom kite.

"The mass ascension will be beautiful. My idea is that the kites are like petals blowing in the wind as they fall from the trees. One day, I would like to fly 1000 pink kites at once."

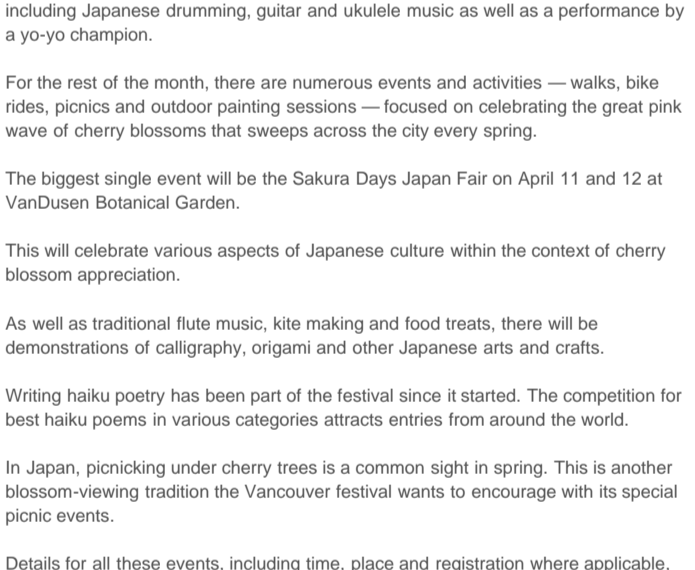
The performance is planned for April 5 from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Vanier Park in Vancouver.

Davis will also be performing kite dances at the main cherry blossom picnic in David Lam Park on April 4 and as part of a Bollywood-style flash dance on the steps of the Vancouver Art Gallery on April 18.

Light artist Stuart Ward is also hoping to evoke feelings of awe from crowds when he again puts on his magical Sakura Illumination show on April 3, in which he uses LED and patterned video lights to illuminate the fragile cherry blossoms.

"This unique experience will create an intangible memory of a time and place never to be duplicated," says Ward.

The time and place for this event will be announced on the day on the festival's website.



Egan Davis flying his cherry blossom kite.

Another artistic introduction to the festival this year is the hiring of two actors to dress up as "festival spirits" to wander and entertain at the picnics to encourage people to get into the spirit of the event and show them how to use the specially-produced folding hanami mats used for sitting on under the cherry blossoms.

Every year Linda Poole, director of the festival, adds new features to make the event more enriching and inviting.

But the festival has never let go of the mantra at its core, best expressed in the words of Japanese poet Kobayashi Issa: "There is no stranger under the cherry tree."

At the heart of the festival is the invitation for all the community to come together under the beauty of cherry blossoms to celebrate the joy and preciousness of life.

The festival gets going, as usual, with its lively, eclectic Cherry Jam at the SkyTrain station at Burrard at noon on April 2, when there will be an explosion of sounds including Japanese drumming, guitar and ukulele music as well as a performance by a yo-yo champion.

For the rest of the month, there are numerous events and activities — walks, bike rides, picnics and outdoor painting sessions — focused on celebrating the great pink wave of cherry blossoms that sweeps across the city every spring.

The biggest single event will be the Sakura Days Japan Fair on April 11 and 12 at VanDusen Botanical Garden.

This will celebrate various aspects of Japanese culture within the context of cherry blossom appreciation.

As well as traditional flute music, kite making and food treats, there will be demonstrations of calligraphy, origami and other Japanese arts and crafts.

Writing haiku poetry has been part of the festival since it started. The competition for best haiku poems in various categories attracts entries from all around the world.

In Japan, picnicking under cherry trees is a common sight in spring. This is another blossom-viewing tradition the Vancouver festival wants to encourage with its special picnic events.

Details for all these events, including time, place and registration where applicable, are listed on the festival's website.

This is also the place to see a map showing where cherry blossoms are in bloom, a guide to all the key cultivars, plus an invitation to file a photograph of your own blossom moment.

With 17,877 ornamental cherry trees planted on Vancouver streets and countless more in parks and private gardens, the city is awash with pink and white blossoms from early March to the middle of May.

For the record, a total of 13,171 ornamental plum trees are also planted along streets. These bloom around the same time, bolstering the impact of the cherry blossoms.

Together, cherry and plum trees account for 22 per cent of the total number of 143,760 trees planted along Vancouver streets — 12.5 per cent cherries and nine per cent plums.

Festival highlights

APRIL 2

Tree Walk and Talk

10 a.m. to noon. | Coal Harbour

Cherry Jam

Festival opening

Noon to 1:30 p.m. | Burrard SkyTrain Station

Blossom Biology

Talk by Doug Justice on how to identify cherry trees.

7:30 to 9 p.m. | VanDusen Botanical Garden

APRIL 3

Sakura Illumination

9 to 10:30 p.m. | Venue TBA, see website

APRIL 4

Picnic, Kite Dance & Kite Making Workshop

11 a.m. to 2 p.m. | David Lam Park

Tree Walk and Talk

1:15 to 2 p.m. | Yaletown/David Lam Park

APRIL 5

Kite Dance with Mass Ascension

11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. | Vanier Park

Tree Walk and Talk

1:30 p.m.-3 p.m., | West End

APRIL 11

Bike the Blossoms

11 a.m.-3 p.m. | South side of John Hendry Park (Trout Lake), 3300 Victoria Drive (@ E 19th Ave.)

Tree Walk and Talk

10 to 11:30 a.m., | UBC.

1:30 to 3 p.m., | VanDusen Gardens

APRIL 11, 12, 18, 19

Plein-Air Sessions & Plein-Air Challenge

The April 11 challenge is a three-hour art competition judged by members of the Federation of Canadian Artists, including Bob McMurray, Caren Heine and Alfonso Tejada. Register by April 9 for teaching sessions by Alfonso Tejada, watercolour (April 12), Jan Poynter, acrylics (April 18), and Maria Josenhans, oils (April 19)

10 a.m. to 2 p.m., | VanDusen Gardens

Tickets and info: from \$35, vcbf.ca

APRIL 11-12

Sakura Days Japan Fair

10 a.m. to 5 p.m., | VanDusen Gardens

APRIL 12

Tree Walk and Talk

10:30 a.m. to noon | Stanley Park

2 to 3:30 p.m. | Queen Elizabeth Park

Cherry Blossom Community Day

11:30 to 3 p.m. | Larry Berg Flight Path Park, Richmond

APRIL 18

Blossom Bollywood & Kite Dance

1 to 2:30 p.m. | Vancouver Art Gallery

CHERRY Blossom Picnic

11 a.m. to 2 p.m. | Centennial Park, Kerrisdale

Tree Talk & Walk

11 a.m. to noon | Kerrisdale.

UNTIL JUNE 1

Haiku Invitational

This year's theme is connections: How do you connect to people, places, and moments of experience in the context of seeing cherry trees bloom?

Info: vcbf.ca

UNTIL APRIL 29

BC Blossom Photo Watch Contest

Tweet or Instagram using the hashtags #VCBF2015 and #AllNipponAirways to win a trip to Japan.

Info: vcbf.ca

swhysall@vancouvernews.com

Read more: <http://www.vancouvernews.com/High+kite+cherry+blossoms/10919932/story.html#ixzz3>

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March 2015

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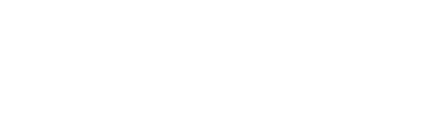
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Explosive fire, 'major

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