

# BLOSSOM TIME

Time for the city to be tickled pink by 36,000 ornamental cherry trees



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VANCOUVER SUN

Vancouver's second annual Cherry Blossom Festival gets under way next Thursday with a Cherry Jam at the Burrard SkyTrain Station.

But the big question is: Will there be enough cherry blossoms in bloom in time?

The festival has teams of cherry scouts looking for cherry trees in full flower in each of the city's 22 official neighbourhoods.

The results of their search are reported daily on the festival's official website, [www.vcbf.com](http://www.vcbf.com), under the "Peak Blooms Updated Report" icon.

In the Hastings-Sunrise district, for example, Kathy Voegtle has spotted a few early flowering 'Accolade' trees in bloom in the 3000-block of East 5th Avenue.

"Still over 90 per cent buds, very tiny pink petals are beginning to open," she reports.

In South Cambie, Sherry Buim spotted a row of 'Accolade' on Laurel between 19th and 20th, while over in the West-End/Stanley Park area Bo Mon Kwan spotted some 'Whitcomb' cherries full out.

In Dunbar-Southlands, G. Chetty came across six cherry trees "almost in full bloom" in the 3800-block of West 39th Avenue.

However, in other parts of town the cherry scouts were drawing a blank.

Nothing to report in Mount Pleasant, Arbutus-Ridge, Kensington-Cedar Cottage.

Nothing to report in Oakridge, Renfrew Collingwood, Killarney, Sunset and Victoria-Fraservue.

All that could change very quickly — in fact, even as you are reading this.

Vancouver has more than 36,000



IAN LINDSAY/VANCOUVER SUN

Linda Poole, creative director of the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival, checks out a blossoming tree on Kits Point Thursday.

flowering cherry street trees and the festival is right in boasting that no other city in Canada has such a display in spring.

It is, however, also true that rain can spoil this magnificent show. What the festival needs right now is some reasonably warm, dry weather. If the sun shines for the remainder of March and into April, we can expect a fabulous show of cherry blossoms.

First to flower are mostly cultivars of *Prunus subhirtella* such as 'Autumnalis' and 'Whitcomb' as early as January and February.

But a much more prominent burst of blooms happens later this month with cultivars like 'Akebono' and all the Yoshino cherries, along with favourite varieties of *Prunus serrulata* like 'Shirotae' and 'Taihaku.'

By April, cultivars of *P. serrulata* such as 'Ukon,' 'Shogetsu' and 'Shirofugen' burst on the scene along with the Takasago cherry (*Prunus sieboldii*) and popular hybrids like 'Okame,' 'Umineko' and 'Amanogawa.'

From mid-April into May, a profusion of 'Kwanzan' cherries — the most widely planted cherry in the city — fills streets everywhere with great clouds of pink.

Linda Poole started the festival

last year after returning to Vancouver from Chicago, where her husband, Christopher Poole, had been Canada's consul-general.

Linda immediately noticed how spectacular Vancouver streets looked at peak bloom and decided to start a festival, inspired by the famous Sakura festivals in Japan.

"The cherry tree has inspired music, art and poetry and it inspires gardeners, too. It outperforms most other trees," she says.

Her hope is that people will pay more attention to the beauty of cherry blossoms and become more aware of other spring-flowering trees and shrubs. She is particularly enthusiastic that the festival will promote community involvement.

With this in mind, the festival has adopted the saying "There is no stranger under the cherry tree."

Organizing the first festival was a learning experience, but this year's been a hectic "24/7 undertaking" she says.

"The website has taken a lot of work, but it is so helpful, we want to keep it up.

"We're also looking for a home for the festival — a garden where we can have a base."

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## Your Guide to Cherry Trees

Here's a list of flowering cherries identified by the Cherry Blossom Festival:

■ **'Accolade'**: A small-growing, umbrella-shaped tree with fine branching, flowering in February or March. The small flowers are semi-double and coloured an intense light pink.



■ **'Akebono'**: A medium-sized tree, eventually becoming umbrella shaped, that flowers in March or April. Flowers are shell pink, fading to nearly white.

■ **'Amanogawa'**: The narrowest of the large-double-flowered Sato Zakura (Japanese village cherries), eventually becoming top-shaped with age. The abundant pink flowers are held to upright stems in late April.

■ **'Autumnalis'**: A cultivar of *Prunus subhirtella*, known in Japan as 'Jugatsu-zakura' or the "10th-month cherry." Its pink flowers appear in January and February.

■ **'Kanzan'**: The most commonly planted of all flowering cherries in Vancouver, producing double pink flowers in late April or May.

■ **'Okame'**: A hybrid cherry (*Prunus incisa* x *P. campanulata*) with small pink flowers in April all along its the slender branches.

■ **'Pink Perfection'**: A common cherry in Vancouver with a large, spreading, umbrella-shaped crown and large, double-pink flowers, lighter in colour than 'Kanzan.'

■ **'Shirofugen'**: A popular May-flowering Sato Zakura cultivar known from the 15th century in Japan, and recognized for its fully double flowers.

■ **'Shirotae' (Mt. Fuji cherry)**: A cultivar that blooms in late April with large, pure white, fragrant flowers.

■ **'Shogetsu'**: A small tree with spreading, rounded crown and elegant pink, frilled blossoms in May after the leaves have emerged.

■ **'Tai Haku'**: A strong-growing cherry with an upright, spreading habit and white, single flowers.



■ **'Takasago'**: An unusual cultivar from mid-18th century Japan with pink flowers that emerge in late April.

■ **'Ukon'**: More upright than spreading, this has flowers of an unusual yellowish green. It has a robust constitution with large, double flowers in late April.

■ **'Umineko'**: This less well-known cultivar, has a small, very narrow vase-shaped crown and masses of elegant, single white flowers in April.

■ **'Whitcomb'**: This cultivar of the Japanese spring cherry flowers reliably in February or March with vivid purple-pink flowers.



■ **'Yedoensis' (Yoshino cherry)**: The parent of 'Akebono,' it has pink flowers in late March or early April. Older specimens are distinctly umbrella-shaped.

## Dancers, drummers will highlight festival

To get the festival off to a good start, a lunch-time Cherry Jam concert has been arranged for Thursday (March 22) from noon to 1:30 p.m.

There will be traditional Japanese drumming by Chibi and Katori Taiko, music by the Calgary Fiddlers, harp playing by Lori Pappajohn with Lori Lister on bells, and Japanese cherry blossom dances by Maiko dancers from the Otowa Ryu School.

There will also be a reading by Bard on the Beach director Christopher Gaze of some of 1,130 haiku poems submitted by writers in 33 countries.

Other highlights of the festival include classes in the art of "plein-



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A variety of events will greet the return of flowers to Vancouver's cherry trees.

air" (outdoor) painting led by plein-air master Alfonso Tejada.

"Outdoor painting is a way to express a moment in time when nature touches the soul," he says.

Starting March 24 for five con-

secutive Saturdays, established and budding artists are invited to participate in three-hour classes from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., at sites where cherry blossoms are in full bloom. The outdoor painting sessions will also feature teaching by artists who specialize in a wide range of techniques. The cost is \$40 per session or \$150 for all five classes.

To encourage young plein-air artists, the festival is putting on lessons for children aged 6 to 13 on April 21 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. The cost is \$30.

For more information about the painting classes or other aspects of the festival, visit [www.vcbf.com](http://www.vcbf.com) or call 604 767 9044.

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