

# IN THE GARDEN



TICKLED PINK

## Into the heart of cherry blossom season

Blooms are fantastic this year but the trees don't know the annual festival has been cancelled because of the Winter Olympics

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Would you believe it? There is no Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival this year. It was cancelled because of the Winter Olympics. And, of course, the cherry blossoms this year have never been better. They are sensational.

Every year since 2006, when it was started by Linda Poole, the festival has suffered from lousy weather.

For the past four years, it was cold and wet, often with heavy rain knocking blossoms to the ground the moment they appeared.

But this year, it was different. We had weeks and weeks of mild, above-average temperatures and virtually no rain for most of February. Some said it was the mildest February in 114 years.

As a result, the early blooming cherry trees, mostly cultivars of *Prunus subhirtella*, such as 'Autumalis', 'Autumnalis Rosea', 'Whitcomb' and 'Accolade', looked fantastic.

Not only were the blooms left untouched by frost or rain, they looked even more eye-catching in the warmer-than-normal sunshine, which went on and on and made the city exceptionally attractive for the thousands of visitors here for the Olympics.

Now we are well into March and the second wave of ornamental cherries is coming into bloom, the most significant being *Prunus yedoensis* 'Akebono' and 'Pendula'.

There are at least 35 kinds of ornamental cherry trees planted in Vancouver. Through this month, we will see star performers such as 'Okame', 'Somei-yoshino' and 'Yae-beni-shidare' followed by knockout varieties such as 'Umineko' and 'Shirotae'.



'Accolade' is an early-blooming umbrella-shaped cultivar of *Prunus subhirtella* that blooms in March.



'Ukon' has a compact canopy and flowers in late April.



'Whitcomb' is an one of the first cultivars to flower.



'Shirofugen' flowers from the end of April to mid-May.



'Shogetsu' blooms in April and means "moonlight on pines."

From April to May, at least a dozen more cultivars will pop into flower, including the most heavily planted cherry tree of them all, 'Kanzan', the one you see lining streets throughout Vancouver.

But there are others that will catch the eye, such as 'Takasago', 'Ukon', 'Shogetsu', 'Kiku-shidare-zakura' and 'Shirofugen.'

The month-long festival usually kicks off with a "Cherry Jam" with Japanese drummers at the Burrard SkyTrain station. It features a variety of activities including outdoor painting, a

haiku poetry contest, and a bicycle tour of top blossom sites.

But the main focus of the event is to get people to stop and appreciate the beauty of cherry blossoms.

If you go to the festival's website at [www.vcbf.ca](http://www.vcbf.ca) you'll find a map of Vancouver pinpointing all the most significant displays of cherry blossoms.

Click on the marker, and up pops the street address and details of the specific cultivar planted there.

The website is still under construction, but it is already a great resource for anyone

wanting to see all the different kinds of cherry trees at peak bloom.

While there is no official cherry blossom festival this year, organizers have come up with an idea to keep interest alive and to continue its goal of beautifying the city and getting people to appreciate the beauty of cherry blossoms.

Teaming up with the David and Dorothy Lam Foundation, festival organizers have launched a project called Birthday Blossoms that is designed to get 3,000 new cherry trees planted in 2011.

David Lam, B.C.'s former lieutenant-governor, is a huge fan of cherry blossoms. "The cherry tree brings joy; one's enjoyment of it brings invisible wealth," he says.

Putting his money where his heart is, Lam decided to subsidize the Birthday Blossoms project, making it possible for people to buy a \$75 cherry tree for \$30.

These trees are already for sale but won't be available until next April. What festival organizers want people to do is buy a tree this spring and pick it up and plant it next spring to mark

Vancouver's 125th birthday on April 6, 2011.

Three cultivars are being offered: 'Akebono', 'Kanzan' and 'Yae-beni-shidare'.

The trees will be ready for pickup at GardenWorks stores as well as VanDusen Botanical Garden. You can order your tree on the festival's website or by phoning 604-257-8120.

Poole says the limited supply of 3,000 trees will be planted all over the city on private property, school grounds and company lawns.

"We are encouraging people to buy a cherry tree as a special gift, perhaps for Mother's Day or a graduation, wedding or anniversary."

Poole says the main purpose of the festival is to "bring the community together, not just through planting the cherry trees, but through an appreciation of the beauty surrounding our city."

She says she is aware that many of the cherry trees given to Vancouver by Japan in the early 1930s are in decline.

"It is our responsibility to plant now for the next generation," she says.

"This is a gift that doesn't stop giving, because every spring we are showered with the soft pink beauty of cherry blossom petals."

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### Calling all garden clubs

Our garden writer Steve Whysall is compiling a list of all garden club spring plant sales for a story to appear later this month. Please send details (date, time, place and contact information) to [swwhysall@vancouver.sun.com](mailto:swwhysall@vancouver.sun.com) by March 19.



SEE STEVE WHYSALL'S BLOG AT [VANCOUVERSUN.COM/BLOGS](http://VANCOUVERSUN.COM/BLOGS)



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## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



A quality mulch enriches the soil and reduces moisture loss.

**Q:** Where can I buy three yards of quality soil-amending mulch? I know you have mentioned some places before, but I have lost your list.

**SW:** I get this question a lot, especially at this time of year. Fraser Richmond Soil & Fibre has great mulches, but you have to order a minimum of eight yards. This works if you can share

a load with a neighbour or two, but it is usually too much for most home gardeners.

At its North Vancouver location, at 20 Riverside Drive, you can bag it yourself or get a yard or two, if you have a truck.

Steven Beattie of Artisan Landscaping looks after the bulk soil and mulch bins at the main GardenWorks store off the Lougheed Highway in Burnaby, but he also delivers small loads (minimum of two yards).

The cost of the delivery, in most cases, is the stinger. Beattie charges \$45 a yard and \$80 delivery. Fraser Richmond includes delivery in the price, charging \$41 to \$51 a yard for an eight-yard minimum.

You can get the same mulch mix for \$27 a yard if you are able to pick it up yourself from Fraser Richmond's North Shore depot.

GardenWorks charges \$3.99 a bag (you bag it yourself) or \$30 for a tractor scoop (half a yard) and \$50 for two scoops (one yard).



*Magnolia grandiflora* can grow 30m high. 'Lemon Gem' is shorter.

**Q:** I am thinking of planting an evergreen magnolia in the front yard. What kind do you recommend and where can I buy a more mature specimen? I don't want to wait years for it to grow.

**SW:** *Magnolia grandiflora* can grow into a massive tree 20 or 30 metres high, so you may want to consider planting 'Lemon Gem', which is a

more manageable, dwarf form. I would try Triple Tree Nursery in Maple Ridge, Art's Nursery in Surrey, or Cedar Rim Nursery in Langley, as they tend to have larger specimens. Another idea is to hire a plant-hunter to do the legwork for you. Michael Luco of Earthrise Garden Store at 2954 Fourth Avenue in Vancouver (604-736-8404), often takes on this kind of commission. He has been working

on a special garden project in Norfolk, England, but tells me he still enjoys the role of a special plant-hunter.

**Q:** I am confused about the best way to prune my established flowering plum trees. We usually prune them for shape and to try to keep them from growing so tall that they block our neighbour's view. We invariably get a lot of vertical shoots, which are unattractive and have been the cause of friction with our neighbour.

**SW:** Yes, flowering plums do produce an abundance of upright, "water-sprout" shoots if heavily pruned. The only thing you can do is lop them off. The only way to make a tree smaller than nature intended it to be is to grow it in a container or regularly root-prune, which involves digging down in a circle around the base of the tree and snipping off the roots, which restricts growth. You might want to try this. But I



Pissard plum (*Prunus pissardii*)

am not in favour of heavy yearly pruning to keep a tree down. This is usually a consequence of the wrong tree being planted in the wrong place. It is rather futile to keep chopping it to keep it smaller than its root system wants it to be.

Root pruning is not that easy, but done properly it can reduce the growth of a tree. It's a bit like bonsai, only on a larger scale.

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