

# In the Garden: Too chilly for cherry? Bloom may be a little off for start of Cherry Blossom Festival



STEVE WHYSALL

[More from Steve Whysall \(HTTP://VANCOUVERSUN.COM/AUTHOR/STEVESWHYSALL\)](http://vancouver.sun.com/author/steve-whysall)

Published on: March 24, 2017 | Last Updated: March 24, 2017 4:56 PM PDT



Hanami (flower viewing) is a Japanese custom of picnicking under cherry blossoms. *LOBO*

Cherry blossoms are a little shy in emerging this year, and there's some concern there won't be enough in full bloom for the start of the annual Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival next week.

Cool weather has kept buds from breaking. But at this point all that is required is a few days of warm sunshine to light the fuse and set off a glorious wave of blossoms to tickle the city pink.

Organizers have their fingers crossed everything will come right by the time the festival's month-long celebrations get underway next Thursday, March 30, with the boisterous Cherry Jam on Burrard Street.

The bell in the tower of Christ Church Cathedral will toll at noon and the fun and games will begin with Japanese taiko drumming, Latin American music and songs by a chamber choir accompanied by a brass ensemble.



Time to stop and appreciate the cherry blossoms. *DARRYL DYCK / CANADIAN PRESS FILES*

Those attending the Cherry Jam under the Accolade cherry trees at Burrard SkyTrain station will also be treated to a surprise performance: a colourful, exuberant splash of movement and colour, the details of which are under wraps.

Washington, D.C., also has a big cherry blossom festival, held around its Tidal Basin area.

But the bloom period lasts only a few days and is quickly over. Blossoms were expected to peak there this weekend.

Here in Vancouver, however, there are at least 54 cultivars planted, producing a much longer stretch of blossoms, lasting from mid-March to early May.

Right now, you'll see Whitcomb cherries, the first to bloom, followed by Accolade, Akebono, Shirotae, Takasago and finally Shirofugen, Ukon and masses of Kansan blossoms.

City streets are lined with about 18,000 ornamental cherry trees. There are countless more planted in parks and private gardens.



Plein air painting will be part of the Cherry Blossom Festival. *JOSEPH LIN*

Plum trees also put on a great show around the same time and many people can't tell the difference.

At last count, there were 13,171 ornamental plum trees planted along streets.

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

How do you tell a cherry from a plum? Douglas Justice, curator of Collections at UBC Botanical Garden, says we can use this simple guide:

“Plums have a more rounded canopy and smooth, dark brown bark. Cherries have a straight brown stem with horizontal lines and a variety of crown shapes, more typically flat rather than round.”



Sakura Illumination is a night when cherry trees are lit up by LED lights. *JOSEPH LIN*

The purpose of the festival is primarily to get people to stop and appreciate the beauty around them, especially the beauty of spring as it throws off the shackles of winter through the power of cherry blossoms.

In the Japanese “hanami” (cherry viewing) tradition, blooms are seen as symbolizing the ephemeral, here-today-gone-tomorrow, transitory nature of life.

All aspects of the cherry festival are focused on getting the message across that it is essential to slow down and appreciate the beauty of blossoms and the magic of the moment in spring when trees come back to life.

The festival is also designed as a community-building event. Families are encouraged to join friends and neighbours for a picnic under cherry blossoms or to take part in some of the special activities planned for the festival — talks, walks, bike rides, outdoor painting classes, lantern parades, poetry, tree illuminations and more.

New this year, Blossom Bliss picnic boxes are being offered by Cocktails & Canapes (<https://cocktailsandcanapes.ca>), a Vancouver catering and events company.

The boxes can be ordered and delivered to a picnic spot of your choice, where festival petal mats can be zipped together to form a waterproof surface on which to sit under the blossoms.



<span class="s1">Sakura Illumination takes place at night when cherry trees are lit up by LED lights.</span> *EVAN CHEN*

In Japan, when people do this they always take off their shoes before stepping on the hanami mat.

A Big Picnic event is scheduled but the date is still not fixed; organizers are waiting until they have a better idea of when blossoms will be at their peak.

For more details about the Big Picnic and the lunch boxes as well as other suggested picnic sites, go to the festival's website at [www.vcbf.ca](http://www.vcbf.ca) (<http://www.vcbf.ca>).

This website also contains a map showing where cherry blossoms are in bloom as well as all other festival info.

Trees will again be illuminated for an “inspiring” light show in Queen Elizabeth Park.

Walks to see trees are planned for April at Coal Harbour, VanDusen Botanical Garden, the West End, University of B.C., Stanley Park and Queen Elizabeth Park. There are also talks on cherry trees planned.

Bike the Blossoms — an opportunity to join a free group ride, starting at Trout Lake through streets lined with cherry blossoms to Nat Bailey Stadium

— is also planned; date to be announced.

The main event at the heart of the festival is the Sakura Days Japan Fair, to be held April 8 and 9 at VanDusen Botanical Garden.



Cherry blossoms will be in bloom from mid-March to early May. *HANDOUT*

Highlights will include a Japanese tea ceremony and demonstrations of calligraphy, cooking, sake tasting, haiku readings, origami and other Japanese arts and crafts as well as a special lantern parade.

The festival's international haiku poetry writing contest will take "freedom" as its theme this year to mark Canada's 150th birthday.

For those who want to try their hand at painting outdoors, there is a Paint Out and Picnic planned for April 20, and 11 artists, specialists in watercolours, acrylics and oils, will also be painting outside at "best blooming spots" during the festival.

For details about times and locations of all the events planned for the festival, go to the event's website at [www.vcbf.ca](http://www.vcbf.ca) (<http://www.vcbf.ca>).

[swhysall@postmedia.com](mailto:swhysall@postmedia.com) (<mailto:swhysall@postmedia.com>)

[twitter.com/stevewhysall](https://twitter.com/stevewhysall) (<https://twitter.com/stevewhysall>)

## RELATED

**In the Garden: Trends from the world's biggest garden show**  
(<http://vancouversun.com/life/homes/gardening/in-the-garden-trends-from-the-worlds-biggest-garden-show>)

**Photos: Brilliant floral design at two of the world's finest garden shows**  
(<http://vancouversun.com/life/homes/gardening/photos-brilliant-floral-design-at-two-of-the-worlds-finest-garden-shows>)

**In the Garden: Romantic gardens are paradises built for love**  
(<http://vancouversun.com/life/homes/gardening/romantic-gardens-are-paradises-built-for-love>)

**In the Garden: Garden centres face new challenge from box stores**  
(<http://vancouversun.com/life/homes/gardening/garden-centres-face-new-challenge-from-box-stores>)

*[CLICK HERE \(mailto:vanweb@postmedia.com\)](mailto:vanweb@postmedia.com) to report a typo.*

*Is there more to this story? We'd like to hear from you about this or any other stories you think we should know about. Email [vantips@postmedia.com \(mailto:vantips@postmedia.com\)](mailto:vantips@postmedia.com).*

**FESTIVALS ([HTTP://VANCOUVERSUN.COM/TAG/FESTIVALS](http://vancouversun.com/tag/festivals))**

**STAFF BLOG: IN THE GARDEN ([HTTP://VANCOUVERSUN.COM/TAG/IN-THE-GARDEN-BLOG](http://vancouversun.com/tag/in-the-garden-blog))**

**STEVE WHYSALL ([HTTP://VANCOUVERSUN.COM/TAG/STEVE-WHYSALL](http://vancouversun.com/tag/steve-whysall))**

**VANCOUVER ([HTTP://VANCOUVERSUN.COM/TAG/VANCOUVER](http://vancouversun.com/tag/vancouver))**

## Vancouver Flyers

