

Spectacular Cherries Blossom at Royal Botanical Gardens

Burlington ON, May 6, 2019 — It's a sure sign that spring has finally sprung—Royal Botanical Gardens' (RBG's) flowering cherry (*Prunus*) collection is reaching peak bloom. The collection can be located at various areas of RBG with greater concentrations in the Arboretum and Rock Garden. Cherry blossoms last an average of four to five days once in full bloom those wanting to experience the collection will have to act fast.

One of the most iconic spring sights at RBG is the flowering cherry circle in the Arboretum. The trees planted in this circle are *Prunus* 'Accolade' and were accessioned in 1966. P. 'Accolade' is a spectacular pink semi-double flowered cultivar that has achieved the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Award of Garden Merit (AGM). These trees look most spectacular when viewed against the backdrop of a pure blue sky. Once the flowers begin to fade and fall the surrounding grassy area looks like it is covered in pink confetti.

Japanese flowering cherries within RBG's collection are some of most treasured and appreciated of these trees. These cultivars have been bred for centuries in Japan and play a hugely important role in Japanese society and culture. The Japanese name the flowering cherry sakura and the art and celebration of viewing sakura is known as hanami (flower viewing) during the day and yozakura (night sakura) at night. The short-lived flowers are particularly important in Japanese culture as a symbol of the ephemeral and impermanent nature of life.

RBG records the flowering times of its cherries on an annual basis as part of a biological science known as phenology, an important tool in helping to track climate change. In 2010, the Gardens added 34 trees to this collection, donated to RBG as part of the Sakura Project, an effort from members of the Japanese and Japanese Canadian communities to plant over 3,000 cherry trees across Canada. These trees are planted at both the Arboretum and Rock Garden sites.

Chefs at RBG's Rock Garden Café are offering special menu items to mark the occasion. Visitors can sip cherry blossom tea and enjoy salmon poke bowl and matcha semi-freddo as part of their cherry blossom experience.

About Flowering Cherries

The colours of cherry flower petals can vary considerably with the colour of the same flower changing from first emergence through maturity to blossom fall. Typically flowers are darker in bud becoming paler as they age and expand. Seasonal conditions, climate and soil type can also all have an influence on the annual colour of flowers.

Cherry flowers are divided into four different groups which are based upon the number of petals. Whilst nature isn't always perfect and variations occur as a rule:

- Single flowers have five petals
- Semi-double flowers have between 10 and 20 petals
- Double flowers have from 25 to 50 petals
- Chrysanthemum flowered cherries have more than 100 petals

The scientific name for flowering cherries is *Prunus*. The genus *Prunus* is in the Rosaceae or rose family. This family not only includes roses and flowering cherries but other notable ornamental plants such as *Chaenomeles* (Flowering Quince), *Crataegus* (Hawthorn) *Fragaria* (Strawberry), *Malus* (Crab apple) and *Pyrus* (Pear). As well as flowering cherries the genus *Prunus* also encapsulates plums, peaches, apricots and almonds. The Rosaceae family, as a result is one of the most economically important crop families.



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