

Tale from the Garden!

Cherry blossom season has arrived!

After a long winter, the sight of pastel-pink treetops and confetti showers of candyfloss-coloured petals are just what we need to cheer us all up. The springtime spectacle that is the UK's cherry blossom season starts in March and lasts until May, signalling sunnier days and longer nights are around the corner. There are a couple of whoppers on The Acres – beautiful now but soon to create a carpet of petals spreading along the road!

In Japan, cherry blossom season is a major event with people flocking from across the globe to see the trees turn rosy. We might not be able to make it over to Japan for their 'sakura' season this year, but thankfully the UK has plenty of pretty spots brimming with blossom. From cherry-lined parkland avenues to castles with manicured cherry orchards, there are plenty of places to get an eyeful of the fleeting blossoms before they blow away. One of the most local venues for such a spectacle is The Stray, Harrogate. You'll find candyfloss archways of perfect blossom all over The Stray: a 200-acre stretch of parkland in Yorkshire's regal spa town. Planted in 1953 to celebrate the Queen's coronation, the blossoms are usually joined by patches of jewel-bright crocuses and sunshine daffodils in spring.



Blooming cherry blossom trees go hand in hand with the arrival of spring, but have you ever wondered about the history of these pretty pink flowers?

A cherry blossom is a flower of many trees of genus 'Prunus' or 'Prunus subg. Cerasus'. They are known as Japanese cherry and 'sakura'. They are also a common species in East Asia, including China, Korea, and especially in Japan. They generally refer to ornamental cherry trees, not to be confused with cherry trees that produce fruit for eating. It is considered the national flower of Japan.

Many of the cherry trees currently enjoyed for cherry blossom viewing are not wild species but 'cultivar'. Because cherry trees have a mutable trait, many cultivars have been created for cherry blossom viewing, especially in Japan. A cultivar is a type of plant that people have bred for desired traits, which are reproduced in each new generation by a method such as grafting, tissue culture or careful controlled seed production. Most cultivars arise from purposeful human manipulation, but some originate from wild plants that have distinctive characteristics.

The UK's cherry tree population made a significant leap when 6,500 new trees were planted across the UK as part of the Japan-UK Season of Culture 2019-20, gifts from Japan to celebrate the relationship between the two countries.

With spring 2022 set to feature some amazing displays of colour, here are ten facts you might not know about these spectacular trees.

1. Not all cherry trees bear fruit

In fact, many ornamental varieties have been bred to produce more flowers and, in some cases, don't produce fruit at all. Most of the flowering cherry trees we see in UK parks and streets are valued for their flowers, with the cherries they produce small and bitter – not great for people but a good snack for the birds.

2. You can eat the blossom

That's right, the cherry blossoms (and leaves) of varieties we find in the UK are edible. In Japan they're pickled and used as ingredients for sweets, baking and tea. Come springtime, you'll also find 'sakura'-flavoured chocolate bars. Don't eat the cherry pips though, they're toxic and can be dangerous in large amounts.

3. Cherry trees are found around the world

There are flowering cherry trees in countries across the globe, including America, Korea, Brazil and India, with many originating through links with Japan.

4. Not all cherry blossom is pink

While pink is the colour most people associate with cherry blossom, it tends to change from dark pink, to light pink, to white when fully in bloom. Some varieties even begin as a greenish yellow colour before changing to white and then to pink.

5. Blossoms are here one day, gone the next

Cherry trees generally tend to bloom for only a week or two each spring. This could be even shorter if seasonal wind or rain knocks the blossoms from the trees. It's one of the things that makes the cherry blossom so special – catch it while you can because it won't be around for long.

6. Cherry trees don't live long

Across all varieties, cherry trees tend to have a short lifespan, typically around 15-30 years. However black cherry trees can live for anything up to 250 years. The oldest known cherry tree is the famous 'Jindai Zakura' in Japan – still flowering every spring an estimated 2,000 years since it was planted!

7. An Englishman saved one of Japan's favourite cherry trees

Collingwood "Cherry" Ingram was an expert gardener with a passion for flowering cherry trees. While on a trip to Japan in 1926 he was shown a painting of a beautiful cherry tree with white blossom, believed to have died out in Japan. Ingram recalled having taken cuttings from a tree of the same species in a garden in Sussex and managed to reintroduce the Great White Cherry, or Taihaku, to Japan.

8. The cherry blossom capital of the world...

...is not in Japan! It's in a town called Macon in the state of Georgia, America. In 1952 a local resident discovered one Yoshino cherry tree and loved it so much that he learned to propagate the trees and gifted them to his community. Macon now has over 350,000 Yoshino cherry trees flowering at their annual blossom festival.

9. Cherry blossoms bring people together each spring

In the Royal Parks in London, cherry trees are up there with ducklings and daffodils as the most Insta-worthy spring scenes around. In Japan there's nothing that compares to the seasonal wave of pink and white that sweeps from the south to the north of the country each year. They're loved for their delicate blossoms, which the Japanese celebrate each spring with parties and picnics among the trees and are planted in public parks all over the country. People gather under the blossoms to share food and drink for 'hanami', a centuries-old flower viewing tradition. Hanami literally means "watching blossoms," and the tradition can be traced back at least a thousand years. Once the petals have fallen, cherry blossom season (hanami) is over. It's also part of why the blossoms can represent fragility and fleeting beauty in Japanese culture.

10. They symbolise more than just a new season

In Japan many schools and businesses have a cherry tree in front of their building. The financial year and the school year both start in April, with the blooming trees a symbol of renewal and a fresh start. In public parks people gather under the branches, eating and drinking, appreciating the fleeting beauty of life with friends and family. The short-lived 'hanami' celebrations are a reminder to seize the day.



Cherry blossoms are a symbolic flower of the spring, a time of renewal, and the fleeting nature of life. The lesson, therefore, that we can learn from the Cherry blossom is ... **We are to seize every opportunity each day brings for God.**

“Carpe diem” is a popular Latin phrase that means “seize the day.”

It means to take advantage of each day and the opportunities that arise as if it’s the last day these opportunities present themselves. It’s squeezing everything we can out of each day; don’t waste a single day because once that day is gone it can never be retrieved.

For believers in Jesus Christ, it means every day should be used to its fullest potential for God’s purposes and for His kingdom. We are to seize every opportunity each day brings for God.

The choices we make concerning the opportunities God places before us determines which road we proceed upon in our journey of faith.

Jonathan, King Saul’s son, seized the day and took advantage of an opportunity that presented itself, winning the day for Israel. You can read the full story in 1 Samuel 13 v23 – 14 v14. God wanted to deliver Israel so He literally hand-delivered the Philistines. It was like God saying, “Here Israel, these Philistines who’ve been tormenting you for all these years, I’ve wrapped them up and they’re ready to be defeated.”

King Saul had the power to act but instead chose, as do many Christians, to sit and wait under a pomegranate tree, or in the pews, not seeing or seizing the opportunity. King Saul only saw an impossible situation, seeing that Israel only had two weapons collectively, and every Philistine was armed to the teeth. King Saul failed to see this divine opportunity and thus failed to seize the day for God.

Jonathan, however, saw it differently. He saw he had half of Israel’s weaponry, so he picked a fight with the Philistines.

They both had the same opportunity, but one missed it while the other seized it, winning a great victory. Far too many Christians are waiting for the right time, only to end up not taking advantage of the opportunities they have. We could call it the “pomegranate effect.”

Jonathan and the other heroes of the faith who did great and mighty things for the Kingdom of God are no different than any of us. They just engaged themselves and seized the day.

Our divine destinies are before us, not behind. God opportunities are all around us. We all have choices to make as to which way to turn. We can ignore these opportunities and hope God will send someone else or we can believe God at His word and see Him do great things.

If we believe and follow God’s word and promises, boldly seizing these opportunities, then we’ll find ourselves taking the adventure of a lifetime, one divinely inspired by God.

Will we choose to seize the day, these moments, these opportunities, or be content to let them slip away?