

# Flowering Cherry Trees

There is a reason that major world-class cities like Washington, D.C. and Tokyo, Japan stage springtime "Cherry Blossom Festivals." The broad splashes of beautiful color provided by cherry trees in full bloom are literally breathtaking. In many Japanese cities, cherry blossom time is the time to sit under the trees, take in their beauty, and reflect on the arrival of a new season, another spring, and newly invigorated life. New Garden's flowering cherries are not fruit trees, although some species may occasionally produce some small, bright red fruit (which isn't messy). The same is true for the closely-related flowering plums and apricots.

Cherry trees love the sun, need good drainage, and, while the pests that bother them are few, some can be devastating if not dealt with promptly. The most serious enemy to the cherry are boring insects called "borers," which literally bore into the trunk of a tree, seriously disrupting the flow of necessary nutrients from its roots to its trunk, branches, and leaves. If ignored, borers can cause irreversible injury and premature death. Fortunately, pesticides containing permethrin or pyrethroids can be used as a preventative. Applying this product to the trunk below the first branches and on the ground around the trunk is supposed to keep borers away. (Always read and follow label directions when using any pesticide)

The other serious cherry pests are Japanese beetles. While these beetles are pesky and will eat almost anything once they get into your landscape, they are particularly attracted to cherries, and other handouts we have available at New Garden can help you control the beetles.

So, how do you pick the right cherry to add to YOUR landscape? Several factors need to be considered initially. Most important is eventual size--most cherries range in height from 20-30 feet and have similar spreads. Secondary to that decision is bloom color, blooming time, overall shape, and location. Our favorites and some specialty trees that are not always available are described below (including flowering plum and apricot).

## OKAME

Let's start with the earliest spring bloomer. Imagine looking into your landscape in early March and seeing a big pink cloud. That is exactly what you should expect from the Okame variety. Occasionally a frost or freeze will reduce the bloom time, but in 1997, the Okame cherries bloomed for about three weeks. Somewhat upright in character, Okame can grow to about 25-30 feet high and 15-20 feet wide in the Greensboro area.

## YOSHINO

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# Flowering Cherries cont.

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The Washington, D.C. tidal basin landscape is predominantly planted with this variety. White blooms that open light pink are somewhat fragrant and provide a big show of color. One of the larger-growing cherries, Yoshino reaches heights and widths of up to thirty feet and could be classified as a small to medium sized shade tree as well. Fall color is usually yellow. ("Akebono" is a slightly smaller-growing version of Yoshino whose flowers exhibit a stronger pink tint before turning whitish.)

## **KWANZAN**

Double pink flowers grouped in clusters lend the appearance of a tree covered in large pink carnations. One of the showiest cherries in the south, Kwanzan blooms later than most and is rarely affected by late cold weather. With a distinctive vase-shaped branching pattern and a rounded crown, this tree grows to about twenty feet high and wide. ("Royal Burgundy" is a purple to burgundy-leaved variety of Kwanzan with leaves opening bright red to purple in spring, turning a deep burgundy through the hotter months, and a bronze-purple in fall. Flowers and fall color are nearly identical to the species. "Mt. Fuji" is another similar variety that has semi-double flowers in clusters and grows slightly smaller.)

## **AUTUMNALIS**

Genetically related to the natural weeping cherries, the Autumn cherry is unsurpassed for seasonal beauty. Growing to a size similar to "Yoshino," this tree generates lots of flower buds that can provide a big show in any season. Normally this variety blooms strongly in early spring and late fall but, if the weather cooperates, Autumnalis can bloom through an entire mild winter. When the climate cooperates, expect a big show of light pink flowers in spring and fall.

## **SNOWGOOSE**

Beautiful variety that has good shape even in youth. More upright growing, 20 to 30 feet tall and about 20 feet wide. Nice white flowers.

## **WEeping CHERRIES**

Natural weeping cherries are not commonly available, but several grafted varieties can normally be found.

## **SNOW FOUNTAINS**

This is a gracefully weeping cherry that weeps to the ground and literally becomes a



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"fountain of snow" when in bloom. Snow Fountains eventually grows to about 12-15 feet in height and width and exhibits a gold to orange fall color. Other weeping cherries grow larger and include the following varieties.

## **PINK WEEPING CHERRIES**

Quite beautiful in flower and form, it is important to look at the trunk of a weeping pink cherry in order to determine whether it is a grafted or naturally weeping cherry. High-grafted weepers are not likely to grow the full size of a natural weeper. On the other hand, a weeping cherry grafted onto low root stock could reach the full size of a natural weeping cherry— 20-25 feet high and wide.

## **RELATED TREES**

### **FLOWERING PURPLELEAF PLUMS**

These trees reach about twenty feet high with similar widths and have light to pale pink flowers usually in early April. New leaves emerge with a bright reddish to purple tint and maintain a deep purple color throughout the growing season. Fall color is not significantly different in most varieties. On a regular basis, these trees produce small, bright red fruits soon after flowering. These fruits do not mature, however, and their aesthetic value far outweighs any small mess they might create. Our favorite varieties include:

### **THUNDERCLOUD**

Retains its deep purple foliage throughout the growing season, perhaps better than other varieties.

### **KRAUTER'S VESUVIUS**

Supposedly more upright and heat-tolerant, this variety may withstand heat and drought better than Thundercloud.

In our experience, it is difficult to distinguish between these varieties at most times of the year. In some years, the quality of one variety or another available to us is better than others. That's where we think you should make the choice: what is the best tree available to me today?

### **FLOWERING APRICOT**

Another tree closely related to the cherries is the flowering apricot. One of the unique aspects of this tree is the time that it blooms. Mid to late winter blooms from light pink to deep red make this small tree or shrub unique. Blooming before Okame, Flowering Apricot can make even the dullest of winter into a showcase for the promise of spring.



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