

# Oyster English Spring News



WASHINGTON'S  
CHERRY BLOSSOMS

# CHERRY BLOSSOMS

**to bloom** (verb): to produce flowers; when flowers open on trees

**display** (noun): something(s) that is out in the open so people can see it

**blossom** (noun): a flower on a tree

**located** (adjective): in a place

**monument** (noun): something that is built to help honor or remember someone or something from the past

**truly** (adverb): really, very much

**spectacular** (adjective): amazing, wonderful

**to flock** (verb): to come together or gather in a group

**the nation's capital** (noun): the capital of the nation (country). Washington, D.C. is the city (Washington) that is located in the District of Columbia. (note: There is also a state called Washington that is located more than 3,000 miles away in the northwest of the United States.)

There are 50 states, one federal district and several territories (e.g., Guam, Puerto Rico) that make up the United States of America. It is common to hear people use these other names to talk about Washington, DC:

- Washington
- the District of Columbia
- the District
- DC

**occasion** (noun): a time when something happens (often a special moment)

**to represent** (verb): to be an example of something

**symbol** (noun): a mark or sign that has a special meaning

**goodwill** (noun): friendly and good feelings toward other people, customers or countries

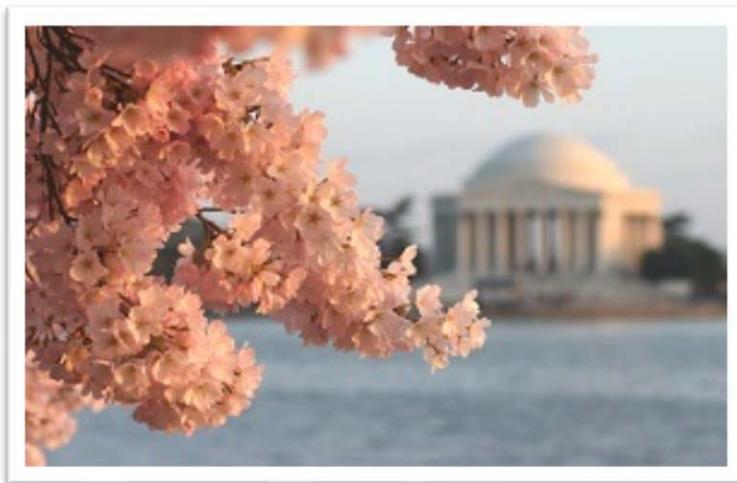
## National Cherry Blossom Festival Washington, DC

Greetings Dear Readers!

I just returned to Switzerland after spending six weeks in the United States in March and April. While I was there, I got to see some of the famous cherry blossoms in Washington, DC and I decided this would be an interesting topic for this month's newsletter.

### Washington's Cherry Trees: A Symbol of Friendship & Goodwill

In spring, plants and trees seem to wake-up after a long winter's rest as they begin to **bloom**. Flowers on the trees are part of the natural fertilization process. Each April there's an amazing **display** of **blossoms** on the cherry trees that are **located** near some of Washington's most famous **monuments**.



Cherry blossoms in front of the Thomas Jefferson Monument

When the trees are in bloom it is **truly** a **spectacular** sight. It's therefore not surprising that many tourists and residents **flock to the nation's capital** to see them. Each spring, there is a three-week national festival that celebrates the **occasion** with a variety of different cultural and educational events as well as good food, music and drink.

But the cherry trees **represent** more than just beauty. These trees—several thousand of them—were a gift to the United States from the citizens of Japan in the 1900s. They are a living **symbol** of the friendship and **goodwill** between the people of both countries and the story of how the trees came to Washington is an interesting one.



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## The Symbol of the Evanescence of Life

Cherry trees have been an important part of Japanese culture for hundreds of years. The flowering cherry tree is called “Sakura” and it is an important symbol of the beauty and **evanescence**—or the fading away—of life. What does this mean? Life is filled with **enormous** beauty but it is also **tragically** short. The cherry trees bloom each year for just a short period of time and their beautiful display gives a visual reminder of how special and valuable life is. It should not **be treated carelessly** because life is **fragile** and **unpredictable**.

In Japanese culture, the cherry blossoms are therefore much more than just a beautiful display of flowers. They also represent the **deeper** meaning of life and its importance.

## History of Washington’s Cherry Trees

### *Mrs. Scidmore’s Visit to Japan*

The beauty of the cherry trees made a great **impression** on Mrs. Elizabeth Scidmore, an American who saw the cherry trees when she was in Japan in the late 1800s. **She was so taken with** their beauty that upon returning to the United States, she tried to **convince** the US government to plant these trees along the Potomac River waterfront.

Starting in 1885, and every year after that for the next 24 years, she asked the Washington parks superintendent to plant these trees. Sadly, every year her request **fell on deaf ears**.

### *Agriculturalist Dr. Fairchild*

Years later, American agricultural specialist Dr. David Fairchild was also **keen** to see the cherry trees in Washington. In 1906, he **imported** 75 flowering cherry trees from the Yokohama Nursery Company in Japan. He planted them in the suburbs of Washington (in Chevy Chase, Maryland) to test whether these plants could **survive** the climate. A year later, the trees were doing well so he **arranged** for 300 more cherry trees to be imported for the town of Chevy Chase.

**evanescence** (noun): the disappearance or fading away of something.

**enormous** (adjective): very big, huge

**tragically** (adverb): something very sad, especially something related to a sad or difficult event or death

**to treat** (verb): to act or behave in a certain way to other people

**carelessly** (adverb): doing something without attention; without being careful

**fragile** (adjective): something that can easily be broken or damaged

**unpredictable**: (adjective) not predictable; something that you cannot say will happen in the future because you do not know for certain the result or outcome

**deeper** (adjective): far below the surface; more important and significant

**impression** (noun): feelings or thoughts about someone or something

**to be taken with something** (idiom): to be very impressed by something; to have something really affect you.

**to convince** (verb): to persuade someone to agree with you about something

**to fall on deaf ears** (idiom): when someone ignores or does not respond or give attention to something that someone else wants them to hear, do or act on

**keen** (adjective): interested and eager to do something or have something happen

**to import** (verb): to bring a product from one country into another

**to survive** (verb): to live, especially through some difficulty or event

**to arrange** (verb): to make plans and organize something in advance

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**lecture** (noun): a talk given to a group of people to teach or give them information

**sapling** (noun): a young tree

**to originate** (verb): to come or appear from something or somewhere

**audience** (noun): a group of people who come together to watch a performance or listen to a talk or lecture, etc.

**to inspire** (verb): to encourage or excite someone to do something

**to take matters in ones own hands** (idiom): to do something by yourself (usually because someone else won't do it for you)

**to donate**: (verb) to give something for free

**First Lady** (noun): the title used to address the President of the United States' wife.

**first hand** (adverb): to see or experience something yourself

**by chance** (idiom): happening in a way that is lucky because it was not planned

**to get wind of** (idiom): to hear about something

**consul** (noun): a government official who represents his country in a foreign city

**graciously** (adverb): behaving in a polite and kind way

**donation** (noun): something given for free

**to transport** (verb): to bring goods from one place to another

**to discover** (verb): to find information about something

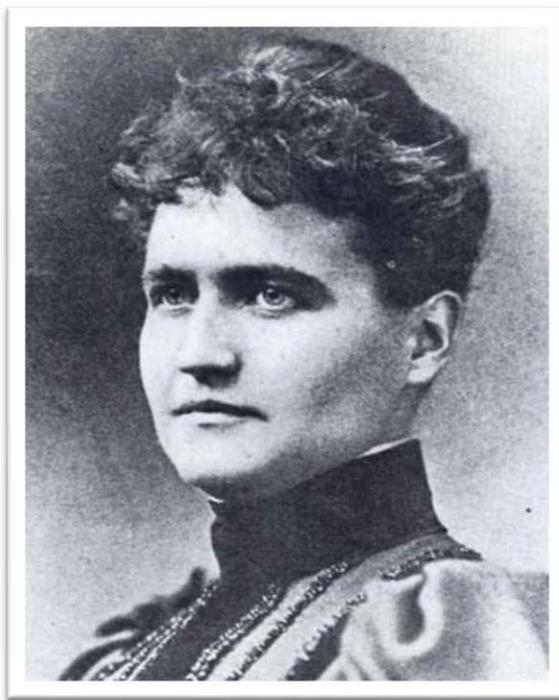
**to be infested** (verb): filled with insects

**insect** (noun): a creature that has six legs and usually flies or crawls (e.g, flies, ants)

## *"Field of Cherries" Dream*

In 1908, at a **lecture**, Dr. Fairchild gave a cherry tree **sapling** to children from each school in the District of Columbia so they could plant the tree in their schoolyard on Arbor Day. This is a holiday in spring where individuals plant and care for trees (Arbor Day **originates** from the Latin *arbor*, meaning tree). During his speech, Dr. Fairchild spoke of his dream of a "Field of Cherries" along the motorway near the tidal basin.

Mrs. Scidmore was in the **audience**. Although she had asked the government for the past 24 years to plant the trees they didn't accept her idea. She became **inspired to take matters in her own hands** and decided she could try to raise enough money to purchase the trees and then **donate** them to the city.



**Eliza Ruhama Scidmore**

## *First Lady Taft & the City of Tokyo's Gift*

Mrs. Scidmore wrote a letter outlining her plan to **First Lady** Helen Taft, who was enthusiastic about this idea because she had lived in Japan and had seen the beauty of the trees **first hand**. She promised Mrs. Scidmore the government would purchase the trees.

**By chance**, the next day a Japanese official was in Washington and **got wind of** the plan. The Japanese **consul** offered to donate two thousand (2,000) cherry trees. Mrs. Taft **graciously** accepted this generous **donation** and these trees arrived in Seattle, Washington at the end of 1909.

## *The Fragility of the Trees*

In January 1910, the trees were **transported** 2,328 miles (3,747 km) from the western state of Washington to Washington, DC on the East Coast. Unfortunately, when the trees arrived it was **discovered** that they were **infested** with **insects** and diseases and they had to be destroyed.

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Despite this **setback**, both the Japanese and Americans were determined to **see this plan through** and the Mayor of Tokyo **authorized** a second donation of even more cherry trees to Washington. A **selection** of 3,020 of the finest trees including twelve different varieties was shipped to the United States in specially-**insulated** containers in March 1912. The **majority** was of the “Somei-Yoshino” (1,800 trees) and “Kwan-zan” (350 trees) varieties.

## *First Ceremonial Cherry Tree Planting*

On March 27, 1912, the day after the cherry trees arrived in Washington, First Lady Taft and Viscountess Chinda, the wife of the Japanese Ambassador, planted two Yoshino cherry trees in the Tidal Basin. Mrs. Taft presented a **bouquet** of “American Beauty” roses to Viscountess Chinda and this simple **ceremony planted the seeds** for the first National Cherry Blossom Festival which is **renowned** today. These two trees can still be found today at the end of 17<sup>th</sup> Street.



Photo credit: Lissandra Melo

## The National Cherry Blossom Festival

During the rest of the **century**, additional cherry trees were planted around the Tidal Basin and in East Potomac Park. The first official Cherry Blossom Festival was held in 1935 and today’s festival includes parades, beauty pageants, concerts, lectures, Japanese cultural activities, interactive art exhibits, sporting activities and more than 200 other events.

In 1954, Japan presented the City of Washington with a 300 year-old Japanese **lantern**, which is **lit** each year to officially open the National Cherry Blossom Festival. The president of the famous Mikimoto Pearls jewelry company donated a **crown** made of two pounds of gold and decorated with 1,585 **pearls**. The crown is briefly worn each year by the young woman who is selected to be the Queen of the National Cherry Blossom Festival’s Grand Ball. She only wears it a few minutes though because it is so heavy and **precious**.

**setback** (noun): a problem or difficulty that stops something from happening

**to see something through** (idiom): to finish or complete that thing

**to authorize** (verb): to give official permission to do something or for someone to do something

**selection** (noun): a group of things chosen from a larger group of things

**insulated** (adjective): something that is protected with material that does not let heat, air, sound, electricity, etc. pass through

**majority** (noun): the largest part or number of a group of people or things

**bouquet** (noun): a bunch or group of flowers arranged together in a beautiful way

**ceremony** (noun): a public or religious meeting of people where there are a series of formal or traditional actions

**to plant the seeds for** (idiom): to do something that will make something happen in the future

**renowned** (adj.): famous and respected

**century** (noun): a period of 100 years

**lantern** (noun): a light that is held inside a case (usually metal or wood with glass sides) and a handle to carry it

**lit** (verb): past participle of verb “to light”

**crown** (noun): a circle shaped object made with precious materials (e.g., gold and precious stones) that is worn by a king or queen at an official occasion.

**pearl** (noun): a jewel that’s a hard white ball that is formed inside the shell of an oyster

**precious** (adj) something that is valuable, important and/or rare

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**descendants** (noun): the relatives of people (or beings) who lived a long time ago. You are the descendants of your parents and their parents (your grandparents) and their grandparents, etc.

**cutting** (noun): a piece of plant that is cut or taken from a plant to grow a new plant

**horticulturalist** (noun): a person who studies or practices horticulture (the growing of plants such as trees, fruit, flowers and vegetables).

**to retain** (verb): to hold inside, to keep something

**genetic** (adjective): related to genes (the scientific information in the cells of the body).

**cloud** (noun): the white or grey shape in the sky that is made of drops of water.

**cluster** (noun): a group of things

**tint** (adjective): a shade of color

## Enduring Friendship

During World War II, many of Tokyo's cherry trees were damaged and in 1952, Washington sent back a shipment of trees that were **the descendants** of the first trees Tokyo gave to the United States. Additional plant **cuttings** have been made over the years by Japanese **horticulturalists to retain** the **genetic** characteristics of the trees and to replace trees that have been destroyed in Japan.

The trees' symbolism of fragility and of friendship and goodwill are beautifully illustrated with this cycle of tree giving between the two countries.

### Festival attendees near the Washington Monument



Photo credit: Lissandra Melo

## Quick Facts

### *How many cherry trees are in downtown Washington, DC?*

Today there are approximately 3,800 cherry trees. The majority of the trees are of the Yoshino variety, which have a great number of single white blossoms that look like white **clouds**.

The next largest variety is the Kwanzan cherry tree, which is named after a mountain in Japan. Its blossoms form large **clusters** of pink double flowers. The other varieties of cherry trees have either single or double blossoms and range in color from dark pink to white.

### *When do they bloom?*

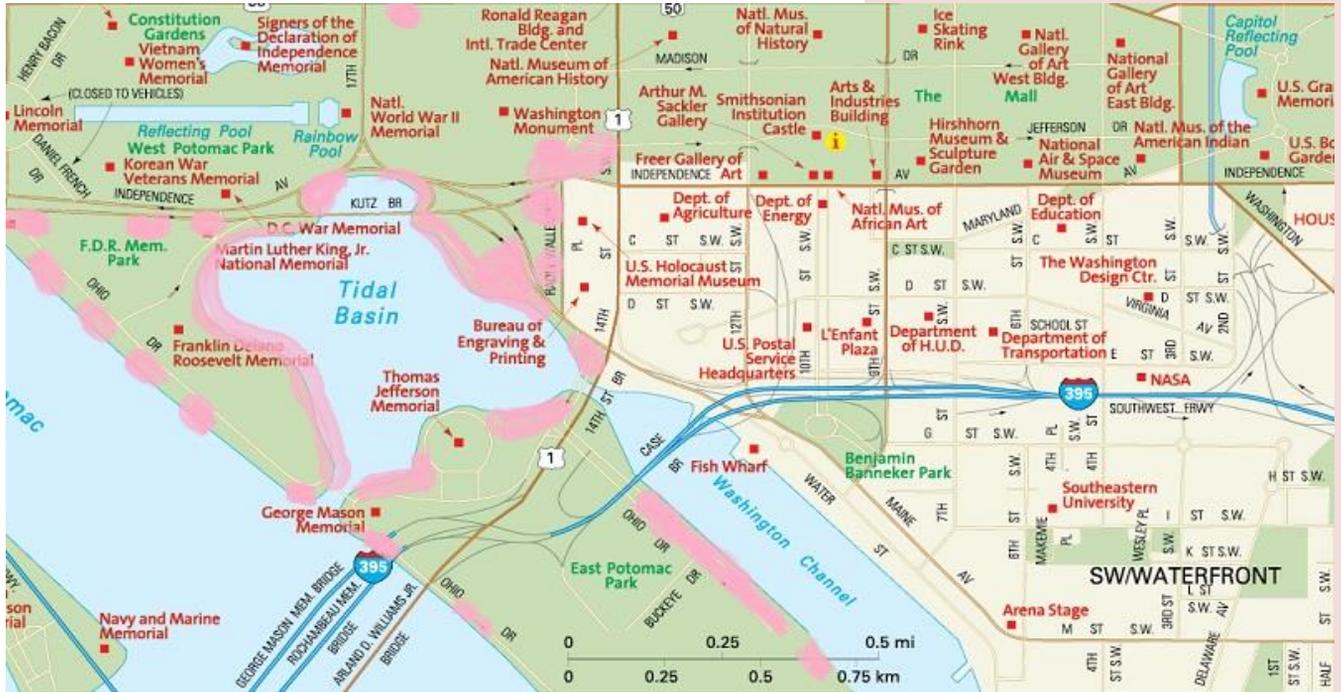
The flowers bloom at different times. The weeping Japanese cherry trees, which have many different forms (single and double blossoms) and colors (dark pink to white) are the first to bloom.

The Yoshino trees (white blossoms) and a smaller number of Akebono cherry trees (blossoms with a pink **tint**) are usually the next to bloom about a week later. Two weeks after that, the following trees begin to bloom: The Kwanzan cherry trees (clear pink double blossoms), Fugenzo (double blossom rosy pink flowers) and Shirofugen (double white when they open and later turn pink). Other selections of trees bloom after that.

Where are the cherry blossoms located?

The trees are located in three primary areas: around the Tidal Basin in West Potomac Park; in East Potomac Park (at Hains Point) and the Washington Monument grounds.

(the pink areas on the map below)



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## Final Thoughts

If you have a chance to go, **it's well worth** the visit.

Thanks for reading. I was very happy that some of you **dropped me a line** last month and gave me some feedback about this newsletter. It encourages me to write the article when I hear that someone is reading it.

So please leave a message about this newsletter either on my website or send me an email reply from the newsletter email.

Best wishes,

Nicole

**it's well worth (something)** (idiom): something that has useful qualities, interesting or valuable qualities

**it's well worth the visit** = it is an interesting event to go to. The experience is valuable enough for the time and energy you have to give in order to go to the event.

**drop someone a line** (idiom): to contact someone by email, telephone, postal mail, etc.