

Did You Know?

After a roller-coaster winter, spring is finally here! One sign of spring is emerging flowers and buds on trees. In the Washington area, in particular, cherry blossom buds are beginning to make a much-anticipated appearance. Those buds are a prelude to the National Cherry Blossom Festival, which will be held in Washington, DC, March 27-April 11, 2010. Each year, more than half a million people come to Washington to participate in the festival. The festival commemorates the gift of 3,000 Yoshino cherry trees given by Japan to the United States in 1912 as a spirit of friendship. Today, only about 125 of the original 3,000 cherry trees remain. Typically, Yoshino cherry trees live an average of 47 years, yet the trees along the Tidal Basin are now almost 100 years old—talk about good living! Still, many of the remaining trees are dying of old age.

Researchers at ARS' U.S. National Arboretum (USNA) in Washington have an ongoing breeding program aimed at developing new cultivars of ornamental cherry trees with resistance to diseases and pests, tolerance to environmental stresses, and superior ornamental characteristics. The ARS team of scientists took cuttings from the original cherry blossom trees and grew more than 500 saplings in their greenhouses. More than a decade ago, ARS gave those cuttings to the National Park Service to help them preserve the genetic lineage of the original trees.

But the beauty of this magnificent tree extends beyond the Tidal Basin. USNA kept several of those cuttings as part of a permanent repository, preserving these regal beauties. More than 2,000 trees representing over 200 types of flowering cherry trees are on display at USNA via a self-guided tour called "Beyond the Tidal Basin: Introducing Other Great Flowering Cherry Trees." The USNA flowering cherry tree breeding work started in the early 1980s, and has continued to blossom. They recently developed

two new flowering cherry trees, 'Dream Catcher' and 'First Lady.'

Flowering cherry trees are a high-value ornamental crop. Approximately 1.3 million flowering cherry trees are sold each year in the United States, with an estimated total value of \$24.8 million. USNA research will ensure that this beautiful treasure lives on for future generations to enjoy.

2010 Cherry Blossom Activities

Watch Them Bloom

Peak Bloom Date Forecast: April 3 through April 8
Blooming Period: March 31 through April 11



USNA Talk & Tour: Creating Diversity in Flowering Cherries, March 28, 2:00 – 3:30 pm

Research

Geneticist Margaret Pooler at ARS' U.S. National Arboretum will share a behind-the-scenes look at how Arboretum scientists have created new varieties of flowering cherries. A brief walking tour of some of the trees will follow the talk. Participation is free, but registration is required. Call 202-245-4521 to register. Visit USNA on the Web for a virtual tour of their gardens: <http://www.usna.usda.gov>

U.S. National Cherry Blossom Festival

For a complete list of activities, visit: <http://www.nationalcherryblossomfestival.org>

Please submit story ideas and national award items to Tara T. Weaver-Missick, tara.weavermissick@ars.usda.gov or call 301-504-1663.