



JAPAN INFORMATION
AND CULTURE CENTER
在米国日本大使館広報文化センター

TEACHING TUESDAY

CHERRY BLOSSOMS IN JAPAN

The cherry blossom has been an integral part of Japanese culture since ancient times, influencing everything from art to food to fashion and more. Cherry blossoms in Japan have been a symbol everything from the noble Japanese soul, to friendship (like with the blossoms give to DC), to hope and renewal. Originally planted in mountains, the falling cherry blossoms were said to bring down the gods from the mountains to the rice paddies and bring about a good harvest. The first written reference to cherry blossoms occurred in the early 700s, and by the Heian era, sakura hanami (桜花見), or cherry blossom viewing, was in full swing.

Originally, the plum blossom was the celebrated flower, but during the Heian period, the elite decided to elevate the cherry blossom instead. Spring was greeted with elaborate hanami gatherings, along with celebrations filled with singing, dancing, and drinking. The celebrations began to catch on in rural areas, as the blossom became associated with the imagery of a fragile, but beautiful life.

During peak bloom, the whole country celebrates as the cherry blossoms make their way from south to north, covering cities and countryside with a pink mist. Hanami remains a popular event, but now is celebrated from noontime on through the night, as local towns string up torches, lanterns, and lights to allow for night time viewing, or yozakura (夜桜). Hanami bento, or special cherry blossom bento, are often prepared to be eaten as well. Hanami is not only a time for good food and friends, but also a time to reflect on the deep cultural tradition the cherry blossoms in Japan.