

## TREE OF THE MONTH – APRIL

Weeping higan cherry – *Prunus subhirtella* var. *pendula* ‘Beni-shidare’, syn. *Prunus pendula* ‘Pendula Rosea’

In honour of the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival, we have selected the weeping higan cherry to be our tree of the month. We have eleven of them planted in and near the Honorable David C. Lam Cherry Grove. They were a gift from the federal government to mark Expo ‘86.

Weeping cherries (*shidare-zakura* in Japanese) have been cultivated in Japan since the 12<sup>th</sup> century. They were often planted near temples and shrines, and many old specimens still survive, protected and cared for over the years by pilgrims and holy folk.

*Prunus pendula* are also known as thread cherries (*ito-zakura*), because of their thin, supple branches, which make their blossoms look as though they have been strung on a thread. The colours of *P. subhirtella* var. *pendula* blossoms vary from pale pink to nearly red. ‘Beni-shidare’, which means means “pink weeping” in Japanese, has deep rosy-pink petals. They produce fruit that are small, sour, and basically inedible for humans (although birds appreciate them).

The blooming of cherries has long been an occasion for celebration in Japan. Blooming begins in southern Japan on the island of Okinawa, then moves north in what is called the cherry blossom front, or *sakura-zensen*, until it reaches the northern tip of Hokkaido. The front is tracked by the Japan Meteorological Agency. Blooming times are predicted and reported by weather networks in blossom forecasts. These are useful to people planning *hanami*, cherry-blossom viewing parties (picnics under the trees to enjoy the flowers). These parties can occur during day or night, and involve lots of food, drink, music, and games. People often hang lanterns for nighttime gatherings.

To have your own *hanami* party, locate a tree with some grass under it, invite friends and have a picnic under the blossoms. Traditional foods include dango (dumplings), boxed lunches, and sake (Note: abide public drinking laws in BC - no alcohol unless the tree is on private property).

You can find *Prunus subhirtella* var. *pendula* ‘Beni-shidare’, and many other flowering cherries, in the Honorable David C. Lam Cherry Grove.

Did you know? Cherries belong to the genus *Prunus*, which includes plums, peaches, apricots and almonds. *Prunus* is part of the Rose Family, Rosaceae, which includes roses and apples.

