

Sakura Cherry Tree Project by Diane Crawford

In celebration of 150 years of co-operation and friendship between the UK and Japan, thousands of cherry trees are being given to parks and schools across the UK, a gift from the people of Japan. As a permanent and lasting symbol of the enduring friendship between Japan and the four nations of the United Kingdom these trees are being planted throughout the UK between 2020 and 2022.

The Japan-UK Sakura Project (www.japanuksakura.org) was launched in autumn 2017 in a joint communique issued by the then Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe and Theresa May, when they met in Japan. It is part of the Japan-UK Seasons of Culture 2019-20 celebrations, timed to coincide with Japan hosting the Rugby World Cup and the Olympic and Paralympic games.

Over 65 Japanese businesses and many individuals have generously donated funds. By August 2019, over 160 parks and gardens, and over 400 schools, had been identified as planting locations and have been participating in this project. Many sites are planting trees during winter 2020/21 and winter 2021/22.



Cherry Tree project logo
(www.japanuksakura.org)



Figure 1: Cherry Trees growing in the nursery (www.japanuksakura.org)

All the trees are being grafted and grown at Frank P Matthews' nursery (Figure 1) in Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire (www.frankpmatthews.com). A total of 6,500 cherry trees of three varieties have been chosen for their variation in colour, timing and historical significance (Kawaguchi, 2021).

The first cherry-tree planting ceremony, in Regent's Park in November 2019, was attended by HRH The Duke of Gloucester and Ambassador Yasumasa Nagamine, and involved children from local infant and primary schools. Although COVID restrictions are delaying the planting programme, many key sites in all regions of the UK have already received and planted a large number of cherry trees.

In December 2020, the first tree-planting in Wales, at St Fagan's Museum near Cardiff, was attended by Mark Drakeford, First Minister of Wales, and Ambassador Nagamine. A total of 1,000 trees will be planted at 65 schools and colleges across Wales and in five Welsh cities (Figure 2). A hundred cherry trees are planned for a field opposite the recently renovated Japanese Garden at the National Botanic Garden of Wales (Hardman, 2019).



Figure 2: Tree planting at St Fagan's Museum
(https://museum.wales/news/?article_id=1203)

Several other UK Japanese gardens are to receive cherry trees, including Cowden (Scotland), Birmingham Botanic Gardens, Gatton Park (Surrey), Iford Manor (Wiltshire), and Kingston Lacy (Dorset). Trees gifted to the RHS have already been planted at Hyde Hall and Harlow Carr, and there will be further plantings at Rosemoor and Wisley during 2021. In addition to many public parks across Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England, four Royal Parks (Regent's Park, Richmond Park, Greenwich Park and Bushy Park) will all be gifted cherry trees. An interactive map (<https://japanuksakura.org/locations/>) provides details of the organisations receiving trees, and details will be added to website listings as plantings are scheduled.

As these thousands of cherry trees mature, they will create spectacular displays of springtime blossom so we will be able to share the celebration of spring in common with Japanese friends across the world.

References

Hardman, G., 2019. Restoration of the Japanese Garden at the National Botanic Garden of Wales. *Shakkei*. 26 (2), pp.18-23.

Kawaguchi, Y., 2021. The Sakura Cherry Tree Project - The Varieties. *Shakkei*. 27 (4), pp.12-13.