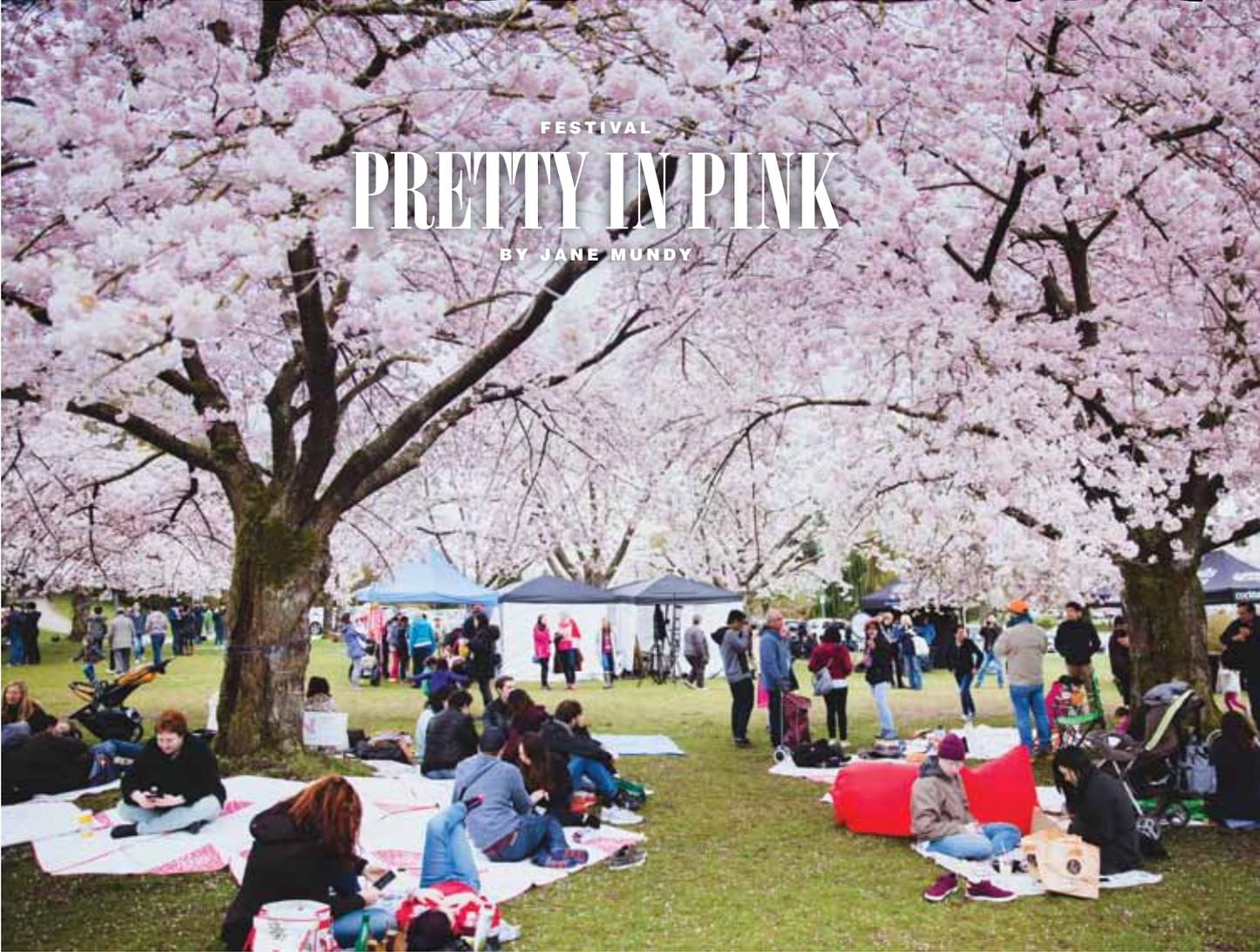


# Due West

FESTIVAL

## PRETTY IN PINK

BY JANE MUNDY



**M**ore than 40,000 cherry trees grace Vancouver's streets and parks, and the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival has become an annual rite of spring. This year's festival runs from April 3 to 29, though whether or not nature's calendar will coincide with the festival is always an unknown.

Vancouver has been decked out in pink since the 1930s, after the mayors of Kobe and Yokohama presented

Vancouver with 500 Japanese cherry trees to honour Japanese Canadians who served in the First World War, but not before they figured out the trees would thrive in our climate.

During the Second World War, sakura (cherry blossoms) served as a symbol of nationalism and militarism—and sacrifice—among the Japanese people. Kamikaze pilots painted blossoms on the sides of their planes and some even took branches of the trees on their deadly missions. Fortunately, the cherry blossom no

longer represents anything sinister and the Japanese believe that their country's national flower is as fleeting as our own lives. They celebrate *hanami* (flower appreciation) season not only for its beauty, but also for its expression of life, death and renewal.

As well, the Japanese use both cherry blossoms and leaves as food ingredients. Blossoms are pickled in salt and *umezu* (plum vinegar) and used in certain dishes, and when added to hot water, made into a drink called *sakurayu*, which is usually

served at festivals instead of green tea.

Linda Poole organized the first Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival (VCBF) 12 years ago. About 100 people, including the media, showed up to Burrard Skytrain Station and under a canopy of blossoms for Cherry Jam, a free concert (April 5 this year) that triggers numerous events throughout Vancouver. "Now the underground concourse is jam-packed with people, some of whom cry with cherry blossom envy," says Poole.

"In 2006, with hardly any money, ▶

we hired a Taiko drummer with very little talent—it was a thin Cherry Jam. We ran a haiku poem contest beforehand, printed the winners on silk banners and hung them on the cherry trees...”

### Timing

Poole says the bloom always begins in the west end and lower elevation areas, followed by Queen Elizabeth Park. “A tree at the Aquatic Centre is usually first, and then the city is awash in pink and white,” she explains.

Fifty-four different cultivars bloom from the end of

March until mid-May, weather dependent. February could come in like a lamb or a lion—only Mother Nature knows.

And lucky Vancouverites don't need to go far: The Parks Board planted cherry trees in every neighbourhood. “Arthur Erickson told me that his mother was responsible. She called the Parks Board complaining about the trees on her boulevard and asked that they be replaced with cherry trees,” says Poole. “They obliged and then all the other neighbourhoods wanted cherry trees.” Or so the story goes.

### Festivities

This year the festival is celebrating through song. “Cherry Blossoms For You & Me” was composed by JUNO award-winning Tom Landa and Robin Layne. It will be performed April 3 at Christ Church Cathedral, followed by the annual “Cherry Jam” concert at the Burrard Skytrain station indoor concourse and a host of other events.

For more information about the festival and cherry blossom locations (on the VCBF neighbourhood map) visit [vcbf.ca](http://vcbf.ca).



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## IS IT A CHERRY OR PLUM TREE?

Here are eight ways to tell if the blossoms you are admiring are from a cherry tree or a plum tree, according to the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival.

**Smell:** True cherry blossoms only have a faint smell, with the exception of some rare, mid-season trees. Plum trees, on the other hand, have a strong, flowery smell. If you're following your nose, it's probably a plum tree.

**Petals:** The oval petals look similar on both trees, but the cherry blossoms have a small split at the end of each petal, while the plum blossoms don't.

**Bark:** Cherry blossoms have light grey bark with horizontal lines on it. These lines are called “lenticels.” Plum trees have dark bark, with no lenticels.

**Buds:** Plum buds are round, and have one blossom each. Cherry buds are oval, and have several blossoms coming out of each bud.

**Leaves:** Check the colour of the leaves on the tree. Plum trees have purple or green leaves that appear to be rolled. Cherry trees have green or copper leaves that are folded.

**Grafts:** Grafts are placed on the upper trunk of the cherry tree. On plum trees, they are placed on the branches, and stick straight up.

**Shape:** Step back from the tree, and look at its shape. Plum trees have a round or oval shape, whereas cherry trees have more of an umbrella shape.

**Colour:** There are more than 54 varieties of cherry trees. The blossoms can be dark or light pink, white, or yellowish. Plum trees have either white or pink blossoms.