

## Your garden in April – Cherry blossom

Spring is a very busy time for a garden designer, and I have been doing a lot of driving around recently. At the moment I have a bit of trouble keeping my eye on the road as I am distracted by the sight of beautiful blossom. Trees that fade into the background for most of the year suddenly burst forth into the most wonderful display.

### Ornamental Cherries

Cherry blossom is the national flower of Japan (known as 'sakura') and is an important part of Japanese culture, symbolic of the ephemeral nature of life. Cherry blossom viewing parties (hanami) and festivals are held all over Japan at this time of year. The Japan Meteorological Agency even provides cherry blossom forecasts so that these celebrations can be planned. Japanese ornamental cherries were introduced into this country in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and now we have many to choose from, with size and habit to suit all situations.

Prunus 'Amanogawa' has a very upright columnar habit and is perfect where space is limited, contrasting with P. 'Shirotae' also known as 'Mount Fuji' whose branches are held almost horizontal. Flowers may be single, as in 'Tai Haku', the great white cherry, or double, pink and frilly such as 'Kanzan' or 'Kiku-shidare-zakura'.



### Cherry plums

You may think you wouldn't recognise Prunus cerasifera, but think of those purple leaved trees that are all around our streets and gardens. Odds on they are Prunus cerasifera 'Pissardii'. It flowers with small single white blossoms. I have one in my own garden which for the first time last year produced delicious red plum-like fruits, something which happens only occasionally.

### Native cherries

Our own native cherries are simpler than their glamorous Japanese cousins, but no less beautiful. Prunus avium, known as the Gean or wild cherry, can be quite a large tree with white, cup-shaped single flowers. Most eating cherries are derived from this species. Prunus padus, the bird cherry is a small tree with abundant racemes of white, almond-scented single flowers. And let's not forget the blackthorn, Prunus spinosa, which turns hedgerows white at this time of year, and in autumn gives us sloes for our sloe gin!

I think we ought to follow the example of the Japanese and take time out to enjoy the sheer beauty and exuberance of this fleeting spring display.... but perhaps not whilst driving!