

Cherry Trees in Battersea Park

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There are around 200 cherry trees in the Park, and around 24 different varieties which we have identified. In this article, we will describe each variety roughly following the sequence in which they come into flower each year.

The most observant of our readers will have already seen the winter-flowering cherry trees in the Winter Garden (*Prunus x subhirtella 'Autumnalis'*). These have been showing a few flowers since November and they put on a particularly good display in January this year.

During January, a few flowers of Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) can be seen. Like other early flowering species of cherry, this is before the leaves come out. Blackthorns continue in flower until April, and in the summer they develop sloes, the small dark blue fruit which is used to make sloe gin. Last summer, there was plenty of fruit on the trees south of the Bowling Green, and most years the tree north of the cricket nets has plenty of fruit (Fig.1). Some Blackthorns have thorns on the twigs.

At the beginning of February, dark pink flowers start to show on the small Japanese Apricots (*Prunus mume*) on the north-west side of the Winter Garden, though at least one of these has died in the last few months. We hope that it will be replaced.

In February, the Cherry Plums (*Prunus cerasifera*) start to flower. The Park has two kinds. One has white flowers, green leaves and pale orange-yellow fruit. The other ('Pissardii') has pink flowers and copper-coloured leaves. Nice examples of the latter can be seen at the north-west side of the Winter Garden and beside the path north of the War Memorial at the east end of Central Avenue. The fruit of these trees is red.

In the second half of February, big

pink flowers can be seen on the two Almond trees (*Prunus dulcis*) – one outside the northern wall of the Old English Garden and the other on the corner opposite the Millennium Arena. These produce a few fruit each year.

In the middle of March, flowers appear on the nicely shaped tree on the grass west of the Children's Zoo. This may be the cultivated 'Pandora' variety.

In the second half of March, the Yoshino Cherries (*Prunus x yedoensis*) on the diagonal avenue running from the Albert car park to the Subtropical Garden are in flower. The flowers have a pale pink tint when they first come out. These are not the hardiest of trees and some have had to be replaced. In 2004, forty trees were planted thanks to a donation from the Governor of Nara Province in Japan and the order of monks responsible for the upkeep of the Peace Pagoda.

As the flowers in the diagonal avenue start to die, the flowers in the neighbouring east-west avenue running to the playground come into their own. There are at least four varieties here.

- The trees with big pink flowers of over 20 petals are 'Kanzan' (Fig.2). Two of the Kanzans also show white flowers on one or two branches. These branches have reverted to a different variety in the tree's parentage (possibly *Prunus avium*). There are more Kanzans south of the lake and near the Bowling Green - one east of the Bowling Green was blown down last year.

- The Mt. Fuji cherry (*Prunus 'Shirotae'*) (Fig.3) has attractive white flowers with between 6 and 11 petals, and the branches spread out horizontally.

- The smaller trees are Great White

Cherries (*Prunus 'Tai-haku'*). These have white flowers with bigger petals.

- An unusual variety is 'Shibayama' (Fig.4). The tips of the white petals have a tattered edge, and the centre of the flower turns crimson after pollination. One of these is the third tallest which has been recorded in England by the Tree Register (www.treeregister.org).

At the end of March there are pink flowers on the Sargent's Cherry (*Prunus sargentii*) north of the cricket nets. This tree has small black fruit and copper-coloured leaves in autumn (Fig.5).

Also in the last few days of March, the Wild Cherries (*Prunus avium*) start to flower. A number of these have dense flowers – the 'Plena' variety. Look out for these in April at the entrance to the Children's Zoo. Wild Cherries are more bitter than cultivated cherries, but can be cooked or used to make jam. Best avoided if they are very bitter, as the bitterness comes from hydrogen cyanide. The trees between the tennis courts and the athletics track have particularly attractive flowers. The Wild Cherries are the tallest cherry trees in the Park.

North of the Bandstand behind the railing is a small Flowering Almond (*Prunus triloba*). This has dense pink flowers in late March and the first half of April.

There are small Tibetan Cherries (*Prunus serrula*) on the north side of the Winter Garden and west of the Pagoda. These have small white flowers in the second half of April and attractive reddish-brown bark.

In the second half of April, the long white flowers of the Bird Cherries (*Prunus padus*, not *Prunus avium* despite the Latin name) can be seen (Fig.6). Flowers of this shape are known as 'tails'. Look out for these

north-east of the cricket nets and east of the Tea Terrace.

There are also some small cultivated varieties of cherry tree around the Park.

Two kinds of *Prunus* which look very different are the Cherry Laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) and the Portuguese Laurel (*Prunus lusitanica*). These are usually grown as glossy dark green-leaved evergreen shrubs. They have upright 4"-6" tails of white flowers which are followed by small black berries. The Cherry Laurel's flowers appear in spring, but some have flowers at other times of the year. The Portuguese Laurel has fragrant white tails mainly in May and June.

There are hundreds of different varieties of cherry tree, and correctly identifying individual trees is challenging. We believe we have identified the trees correctly. Contact the authors using the email address at the end of this article if you would like to meet in the Park to explore the trees together.

To discuss cherry trees, or other trees and shrubs in Battersea Park, contact batterseaparktre_ewatchers@btinternet.com



Fig 1.



Fig 2.



Fig 3.



Fig 4.



Fig 5.



Fig 6.