

The Augusta Chronicle

COLUMNS

Campbell Vaughn: Early blooming trees are showing up ahead of spring. Here are some favorites

Campbell Vaughn Columnist

Published 4:07 a.m. ET Feb. 21, 2025

Key Points AI-assisted summary ⓘ

These ornamental trees, celebrated for their vibrant colors, thrive in sunny conditions and come in various sizes and bloom times.

Popular varieties include Japanese Apricot, Okame Cherry, Yoshino Cherry, and Kwanzan Cherry, each with unique characteristics.

While susceptible to heat and humidity, which can shorten their lifespan, ornamental cherries remain a beloved symbol of spring.

We all got cheated. The weather was so nice and then boom, cold, wet winter again. The wind and rain last Saturday night brought back some PTSD from Helene. It was scary.

If we can get past these next couple of days, the view forward does have some rose tints to the lenses.

Some of the early blooming trees are starting to show up in my travels around town. It makes me happy to finally see some color after a long period of drab. Flowering apricots and cherries have started blooming, which means there is hope for spring.

There are a variety of flowering trees in the Prunus genus that are known for their showy flowers in the spring. These aren't the apricots we use for jams or cherries in pies. They are the ones we use to celebrate spring.

These later winter showy trees have a host of different sizes, flower types and bloom times. All these flowering ornamentals bloom best with a good bit of sun and there are a few that have been my favorites through the years.

Need a break? Play the USA TODAY Daily Crossword Puzzle.

Japanese Apricot (*Prunus mume*) is usually the first of the flowering ornamental fruit trees to show their color. This rounded 15- to 20-foot tree has fragrant light pink blooms on bare branches from late January into February. This oriental tree has been cultivated for more than 1,500 years and has more than 300 cultivars. It does well in full sun to light shade.

Okame Cherry (*Prunus x incamp 'Okame'*) has pink blooms in early spring that are usually Pepto Bismal pink around President's Day. They are mildly fragrant and a good indicator that spring might be around the corner. Okame grows 20- to 25-feet high and has a little longer flowering period than other cherries. This cherry is more upright than wide.

Yoshino Cherry (*Prunus x yedoensis*) is a popular one in some places. This cherry is a little wider than tall, spreading to 35 feet and reaching an apex of 25 feet. The blooms are white to pink and arrive early to mid-spring. The glossy foliage turns a bright yellow in the fall before shedding its leaves for the winter.

Campbell Vaughn: Do you want to avoid summer weeds in your lawns? Now is the time to act.

For a little smaller flowering cherry that is very showy, try the Kwanzan Cherry (*Prunus serrulata*). This cherry is a little more upright and blooms around Masters time. The pink/white double clusters of flowers are like a tree of carnations.

Washington, D.C., has the National Cherry Blossom Festival from March 20 to April 13 commemorating the 1912 gift of 3,000 cherry trees from the mayor of Tokyo. About 1.5 million visitors come to our nation's capital to participate in the cherry themed celebration every year.

Not to be outdone, Macon, Georgia has the International Cherry Blossom Festival every spring based on the Yoshino Cherries that were planted by William Fickling Sr. in the early 1970s. This event in Macon has become a Top 20 event in the South with hundreds of activities during a month of celebrating the cherry. If you feel like going out this weekend, it is Feb. 22.

Flowering apricots and cherries don't come without their set of problems. Our heat and humidity in Georgia can limit the lifespan on these flowering ornamentals. They sometimes will only last 15 years.

In the proper place, ornamental cherries are a great plant to really show off some spring colors.