

A Day in the Life

はなみ
花見

Hanami

Enjoying the Cherry Blossoms

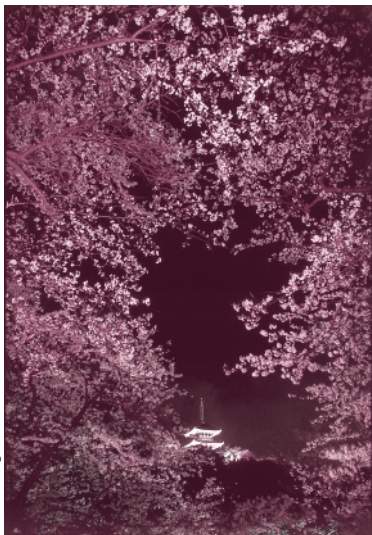


Photo: Hongô Jin

さくら 桜もぼくたちの入学を
お祝いしてくれてるみたい！
Look! The cherry blossoms are
celebrating our first day at school!

よざくら 夜桜

Cherry blossoms at night
After the sun goes down, the
cherry blossoms cast pale
shadows against the dark sky.
Enjoying the flowers by night,
too, is a special pleasure of
the season.

The cherry blossom is Japan's national flower. The advent of the cherry blossom season between late March and early April not only heralds the coming of spring but the beginning of the new academic year for schools and of the new fiscal year for businesses. During this period, the weather authorities at the Meteorological Agency report on the advance of the *sakura zensen*, "the cherry blossom front," as warm weather moves northward, and people begin to look forward with anticipation to its arrival and the true end of winter's cold that it signals. As the trees begin to bloom, people gather beneath them to enjoy the flowers.

The Japanese cherry blossoms open all at once and the petals fall after a relatively short span, about one week or 10 days, and their very delicacy and transience have poignant and poetic appeal. In this issue, we look at this best-loved of flowers in Japan and the events and artifacts that express this appeal.

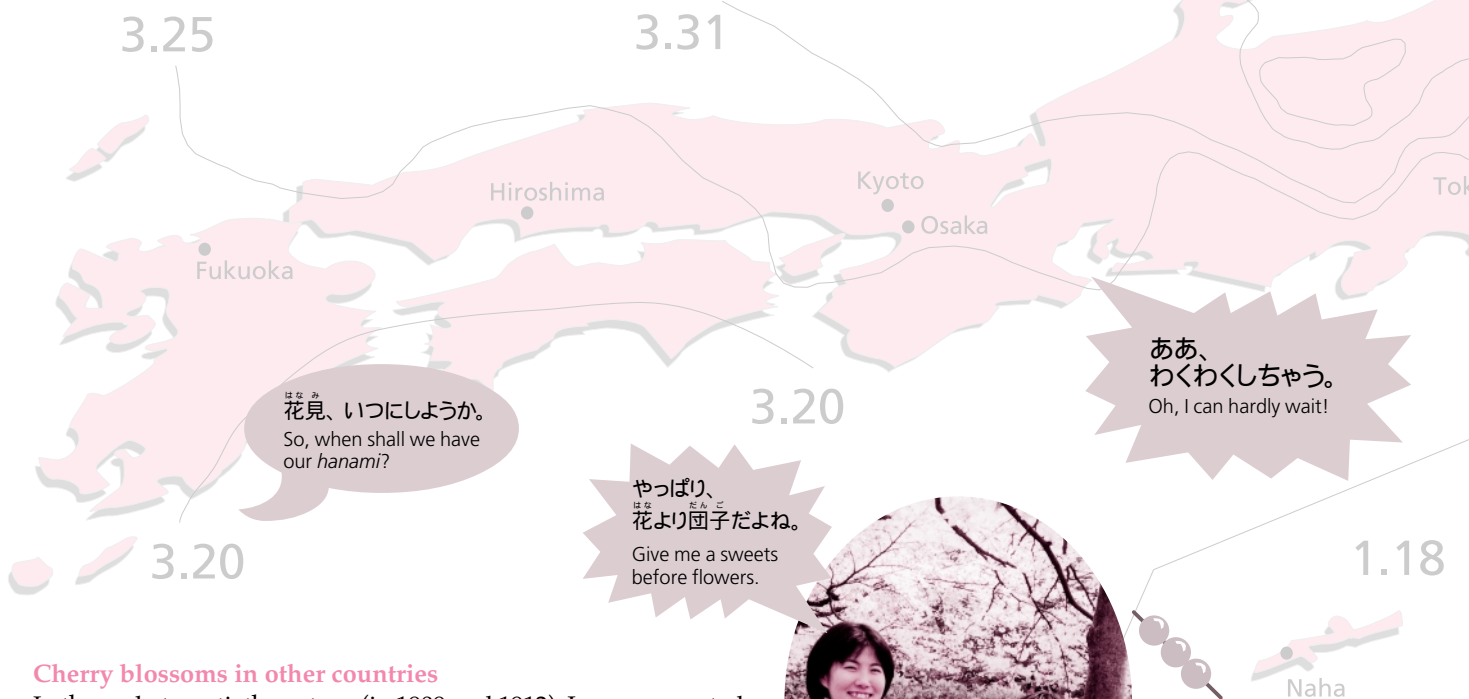


にゅうがくしき
Nyūgakushiki 入学式

Celebrating entrance to a new school
In Japan, the school year begins in April, and so does the fiscal year for businesses. During this month, the cherry blossoms are in the full bloom of spring, heightening the experience of starting something new. Schools hold commencement ceremonies for new classes of entering first-year students. First-grade students receive a brand-new school satchel—called a *randoseru* (from Dutch, ransel)—from their parents or grandparents when they begin school.

4.5

4.10



Cherry blossoms in other countries

In the early twentieth century (in 1909 and 1912), Japan presented gifts of flowering cherry trees to the United States as symbols of goodwill, and these were planted in Washington, D.C., where they are now one of the most attractive sights of that city. In other countries, including the Republic of Korea, China, Australia, New Zealand, as well as countries in Europe and South America, the Japanese cherry blossom season can be enjoyed just as in Japan.



はなより団子
Hana yori dango 花より団子

"If I have to choose, I'd take
food before flowers."

Proverb that expresses the priority
people give to things that are real and
tangible in contrast to those that are
abstract and difficult to grasp.



Photo: Hongō Jin

Hanami 花見

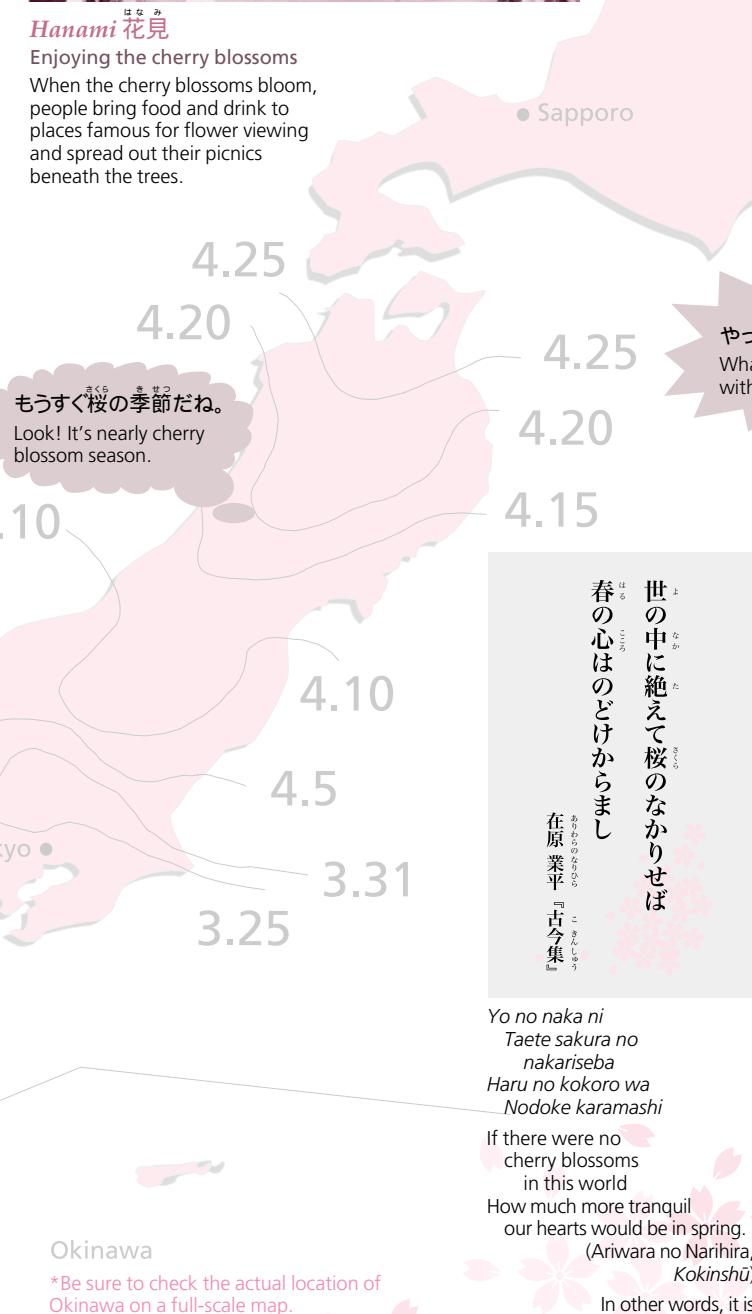
Enjoying the cherry blossoms

When the cherry blossoms bloom, people bring food and drink to places famous for flower viewing and spread out their picnics beneath the trees.

Sakura zensen 桜前線

The cherry blossom "front"

The line formed across the Japanese archipelago by the locations where the cherry blossoms have begun to open is called the *sakura zensen*, using the weather broadcasting term "front," as in "cold front," or "cherry blossom front." The daily weather report on television includes news on where the *sakura zensen* stands and where the blossoms are out as well as when it can be expected to move further northward. (People begin to plan their *hanami* as the date forecast for the opening of the cherry blossoms in their area nears.) The *sakura-zensen* map shown here shows the dates for the "cherry-blossom front" for 1999. As the front moves northward, we can hear the voices of people looking forward to its arrival.



History of Hanami

In the ancient period, flower viewing—*hanami*—referred to enjoying the blossoms of the Japanese apricot—*ume*, but since the Heian period (794–1185) it has meant cherry-blossoms. Originally a religious ritual, the *hanami* was held on a particular day. With the coming of spring it was customary to perform ceremonies prior to the beginning of planting, forecasting the harvest for the year from the condition of the cherry blossoms. Then, likening the cherry trees in full bloom to a bumper harvest of rice, they would celebrate with food and drink under the trees. In those days it was a tradition observed only by the nobility and upper classes.

From medieval times, the way cherry petals fall at the height of their beauty (that is, before they have withered and become unsightly) and the transience of their span assumed symbolism both in the warrior code and in Buddhism. Soon the cherry blossoms became an expression of the samurai way of life. The custom of *hanami* spread to the warrior class, and the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–98), who played a major role in the unification of the country, held historically grand *hanami* to flaunt his power. Cherry blossom parties spread to commoners in the era of cultural ferment toward the end of the seventeenth century known as Genroku (1688–1704). Families, groups of friends, or workmates would gather for merry feasting and drinking.

Today, *hanami* is no more than a private, popular opportunity for having a good time.

Sakura fubuki 桜ふぶき

Cherry blossom "snowstorm"

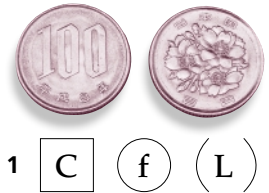
When cherry blossom petals start falling heavily, the flurry blossoms are described as a "cherry snowstorm."

桜あれこれ

Sakura Miscellany

Cherry blossoms can be found everywhere in Japanese life, as you can tell from the items shown here. Photographs and pictures 1 to 9 are cherry blossom related items. Can you tell what they are? What are they used for? What connection do they have with cherry blossoms? See if you can guess from the boxes below. Try to find related Japanese word for each item (from A to I), its English translation (from a to i), and explanations (from J to R), and fill the answer as shown in the example. The answers are at the bottom of page 13.

example:



2 [] ()



3 [] ()



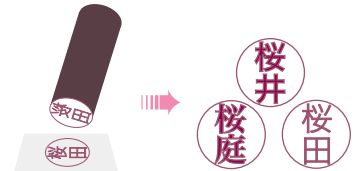
5 [] ()



6 [] ()



4 [] ()



7 [] ()



8 [] ()



9 [] ()



Compiled by Kawauchi Sayumi © Ai Kikaku Center

Photos (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9): Hongō Jin

A. でんしゃ *densha* / B. かんばん *kanban* / C. おかね *okane* / D. はんこ *hanko* / E. のみもの *nomimono* / F. むかしばなし *mukashi banashi* / G. おかし *okashi* / H. スタンプ *stanpu* / I. なふだ *nafuda*

a. stamp / b. folk tale / c. name tag / d. drink / e. personal seal / f. money or coin / g. train / h. sign / i. confection

J. *Sakura-mochi*: Seasonal Japanese confection (*wagashi*) for March and April. This one is made by rolling up a ball of sweet red-bean paste (*anko*) in a pancake made of flour paste dyed pink and then wrapping the whole in a salt-preserved cherry-tree leaf.

K. Carved with the characters of the person's surname, they are used in place of a signature. Japanese names incorporating the character for *sakura* are fairly common, including Sakurai 桜井 ("cherry well"), Sakurada 桜田 ("cherry field"), and Sakuraba 桜庭 ("cherry garden").

L. The cherry tree motif, Japan's national flower, can be found carved on the back of 100 yen coins.

M. The superexpress "Sakura" is a sleeper train that runs between Tokyo and Nagasaki in Kyushu. The front of the train is marked with a *sakura* motif.

N. The Sakura Bank is one of Japan's largest banks. Its logo features the cherry blossom that is such a familiar symbol to all Japanese. The bank's image color, moreover, is pink. Another business that takes

advantage of this motif is Sakuraya, a well-known chain of electric appliance discount shops. Many other kinds of shops, including drug stores and supermarkets, often use the name "Sakura."

O. Children at kindergartens usually wear a name tag; this kind of cherry-blossom-shaped, pink name tag holder is especially common.

P. The kind-hearted old man, "Hanasaka-jiisan," became famous when he tossed ashes over a withered cherry tree and made the tree come into bloom.

Q. *Sakura-yu*: This tea is made by steeping a salt-preserved cherry blossom in hot water. It is often served in place of regular green tea at weddings and other celebrations.

R. Elementary school teachers often use stamps like this to mark their students' papers. Those who have done their assignments properly or finished a project can earn this badge of achievement. In the center of the cherry blossom motif are written the words "yoku deki-mashita" ("well done!").

Activity on Cherry Blossom

Science

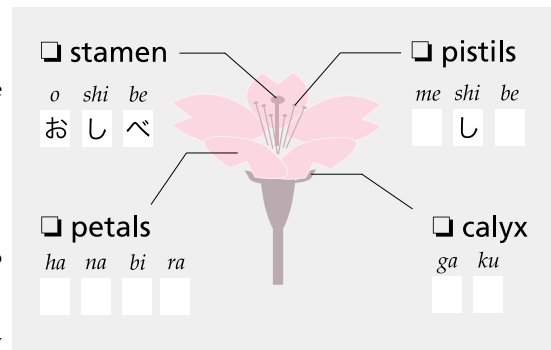
理科

(1) The structure of the cherry blossom

- The parts of the cherry blossom are written in roman letters. Try to complete the blanks with the proper hiragana character.
 □ How many petals does a cherry blossom have?

(2) The cherry blossom "seasonal front"; the cherry blossom forecast.

- Check the map in page10-11, and answer the questions below.
 a. What day of what month did the cherry blossoms begin to bloom in Tokyo in 1999?
 b. What days did the season begin in Osaka, Kyoto, Hiroshima?
 c. Where do the cherry blossoms open first, Sapporo or Fukuoka? How many days apart?



The structure of the cherry blossom

Music

音楽

The song, "Sakura" has been treasured and passed down since ancient times. Write the reading of the words in roman letters below the hiragana and try singing the song.

さくら さくら やよいの そらーは
 みわたす かぎり かすみか くもーか においぞ
 いずーる いざや いざや みにゅーかん

"Sakura"
 Cherry blossoms, cherry blossoms
 As far as you can see
 Across yayoi* skies
 Is it mist? Is it clouds?
 Ah, the fragrance!
 Let us go, let us go, and see!

*Yayoi = third month of the lunar calendar, i.e., March-April

Let's discuss and think

(1) Using the articles and pictures from page 10 to page 12, see if you can answer the questions in the following dialogue.

Q: When do the cherry blossoms flower in Japan?

A: They blossom in _____.

Q: About what month is that?

A: It's about _____. In Japan, the school year, too, begins in _____. When the cherry blossoms bloom, people go for _____mi then.

Q: _____mi? What does that involve? What kinds of things do they do?

A: They _____ beneath the cherry trees. The cherry blossoms bloom for about _____ days. The cherry blossoms are beautiful, too, when the petals are falling.

(2) Q & A about flowers

1. あなたの好きな花はなんですか。
 What flowers do you like?

2. その花はいつ咲きますか。
 When does that flower bloom?

3. どんな色ですか。どんな形ですか。
 What color is it? What shape is it?

6. あなたの国の国花はなんですか。
 What is the national flower of your country?

7. あなたの国や地域で人びとに
 人気のある花はなんですか。
 What flowers are popular
 in your country or region?

8. あなたの国や地域で、日々の
 生活や特別な行事に欠かせな
 い花がありますか。
 Is there any flower that is
 closely related to daily life
 or important events in
 your country or region?



Sakura Goods Present

Please send your comments on TJJF Newsletter!

Don't Miss This!

A "yoku dekimashita" teacher's stamp, like that introduced in this article, and assorted cherry-blossom motif stationery items, will be sent to the first five persons to reply.

Under the subject line "Sakura Present," send e-mail to: forum@tjjf.or.jp or send fax to +81-3-5322-5215. Give your name, e-mail address, affiliation (school where you are employed), postal address, telephone and fax number. Please include your comments about the TJJF Newsletter.



Answers:
 2. I-c-O, 3. E-d-Q, 4. H-a-R, 5. B-h-N,
 6. G-i-J, 7. D-e-K, 8. F-b-P, 9. A-g-M