



FROM LATE MARCH, through April and into early May, people turn out to enjoy the colorful blossoms in Beijing's parks. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY, LI XIN AND JIN LIWANG / XINHUA

# Popping petals color the capital

Beijing captivates nature lovers each spring with the spectacular blooms of flowers in the city's parks and countryside

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When Beijing is blooming, nature draws growing numbers of people to the capital's parks and scenic spots to experience the fireworks of flowers, including such visual delicacies as mountain peaches, apricots and cherries.

Peng Yang, her husband and their 4-year-old daughter recently visited Beijing's Yuyuantan Park to see cherry trees in full bloom. They also invited the families of a few of their daughter's kindergarten classmates.

"The children were curious about nature and enjoyed one another's company," Peng said.

The kids initially tried to pick the prettiest flowers until their parents intervened.

"Then they tried to catch the tiny petals that wafted from the trees with outstretched hands," she said. "They also enjoyed snapping photos of their favorite flowers. They were so excited to see the yellow winter jasmine that they read its name aloud. They had just learned about it in class."

They used an app to identify a species after taking photos.

Botanist Shi Jun said: "Parents should learn about the species beforehand so they can teach their kids. If children ask a tough question, they should tell them they don't know the answer rather than pretending."

Shi, who lives in Beijing, founded the Corn Lab, which popularizes science among children on social media. He also makes short videos introducing plant species.

"Chinese have in the past decade increasingly come to appreciate cherry blossoms, most varieties of which come from Japan," Shi said. "They're gorgeous in full bloom ... and are a novelty unlike the flowers Chinese previously enjoyed."

Ancient people preferred plum and peach blossoms. Peonies were particularly popular in the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Chinese today prefer roses and lilies, Shi said.

"We have more species than before, since many — like hyacinths and tulips — have been introduced from around the world," he said.

He recommends people take a moment to notice the ubiquitous

small flowers at roadsides, such as purple Chinese violets.

"These little, colorful flowers are also pretty. But many people neglect them in favor of the blossoming trees," he said.

Hiking offers an opportunity for outdoor types to enjoy flowers, as well as nature's other offerings, said Wang Jiarui, founder of Yicun Travel.

Wang's agency organizes weekly day trips to the capital's countryside, where mountain peach blossoms in full bloom are a special highlight each year. "Visitors can drive to these places to enjoy the landscapes and delicious meals at farmhouses," she said.

She recently guided a group to Yanqing county's Xiangtun village to hike a section of unrestored Great Wall and the Dayun Valley.

"It's a relatively easy trek — suitable for newbies. And it offers panoramic views of the zigzagging wall, beacon towers and flowers," she said.

Yicun Travel organized trips last month to Pinggu district's annual International Peach Blossom Music Festival. Events included exhibitions, cycling and bungee jumping

in scenic spots in the district that is blanketed each spring with more than 14,000 hectares of peach blossoms.

Visitors can stroll over 200 meters along a glass bridge spanning two cliffs in the Tianyun Mountains.

Vast swaths of Daxing district's Panggezhuang town bloom with white pear flowers in April. Ancient trees remain in Lihua village, whose name translates as pear flower. It was the imperial family's designated pear supplier during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

Closer to downtown, the Beijing Botanical Garden hosts up to 10,000 flora species and the annual Beijing Peach Flower Festival. The mountain peach blossoms tend to reach full bloom a week earlier than is typical in Beijing, around the time that the garden's Yulan Magnolia, forsythia and cornel are also unfolding their petals.

Entering from the southeast gate leads visitors along a pathway lined with pink blossoms. Walking west takes visitors to the South Lake, where pink mountain peach and yellow winter jasmine blossoms are mirrored in the ripples.

Tulips, Chinese crab apple and cloves erupt next.

At Yuyuantan Park, home to the annual Cherry Blossoms Culture Festival, early warm temperatures caused the first trees to blossom on March 12, the earliest since 2002. They burned white, light pink, light green and dark red for about a month.

The park's flower photography contest runs until May 5. Meanwhile, there are trained officers to stop and even fine those who pick flowers. About 70 surveillance cameras keep watch.

It stands to reason that the ancient imperial garden of the Summer Palace presents spectacular patterns of color with the pride of a peacock. The grounds' elegant design earned a UNESCO World Heritage Site listing, after all.

It also hosts traditional pavilions, halls and temples, perched atop and nestled among hills and ponds.

Kunming Lake, the central lake on the Summer Palace grounds, is wreathed with mountain peach and Yulan magnolia before other flowers like peonies come into bloom, all adding color and allure to China's capital.