

REVIEW

JAPANESE FLOWERING CHERRIES

WYBE KUITERT, ARIE PETERSE

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The Japanese *sato-zakura*, literally “village cherries”, represent perhaps the most popular subject of dendrology and ornamental horticulture. The authors rose to the occasion to write an extraordinary account of Japanese cherries and shed more light on a still confused group of these aristocratic flowering trees. Kuitert teaches at the Kyoto University of Art and Design while Peterse is a dedicated plant breeder and researcher of the Japanese flowering cherries. Rarely do professors have the time, or take the time, needed to solely write such a thoroughly prepared text. Both Dutchmen paid attention to detail, and the result is a well-written, high-quality product.

Kuitert begins with an introductory chapter that presents the impressive and exciting story. The reader will learn many anecdotes from the natural and cultural history of Japanese flowering cherries. For example, the author describes how the cherry (*Prunus* × *yedoensis*) was pushed forward and used as the nation’s flower and symbol, the story of the cherry diplomacy in a donation of thousands of specimens for the public plantings in the U.S. (known as the “Potomac cherry”), the story of changing periods as the cherry waxed and waned in popularity, and many more. This chapter is filled with fun, interesting, and valuable facts that are often omitted in typical botanical textbooks. The second chapter pays attention to the strategies and techniques associated with the culture and propagation of cherries. The text is rich in “how to” instructions aimed at propagator beginners, fine black and white line drawings are excellent presentations of important ideas. What I miss from the world-renowned authors are useful hints for experienced growers of how to avoid occurring pitfalls because it could be expected from such a complete and workmanlike volume. The next chapter relates botanical descriptions of cherry flowers, buds and twigs from the morphological perspective, followed by the classification key prepared by Arie Peterse. The recommended key for the public is not exhaustive and does not cover cherries with umbellate inflorescences, but works well to recognize dozens of popular cultivars of the *Prunus serrulata* group.

The substantial part of the book is devoted to the Japanese wild cherries. Wild cherries, even those of the Chinese and Korean origin that may figure in the parentage of modern cultivars, come in detailed botanical descriptions accompanied by distribution maps and excellent colour photos of blossoms. Sometimes it is hard to believe that flowering twigs of *Prunus incisa* and *P. serrulata* varieties, or blossoms of *P. × yedoensis* and *P. × subhirtella* hybrids may be treated as “wild” cherries. On the other hand, the famous Japanese garden cherries that have been cultivated since the feudal Edo period and may be found in many gardens and public parks of the world lack a clear hybrid or selection history and man cannot be sure about their parents. Garden cherries (*sato-zakura*) represent the themes of the heart of the book. Japanese sources group all the garden cherries under the taxon *Prunus lannesiana* though no living specimens and herbarium are available. The authors uphold an internationally valid name *Prunus serrulata*. Fifty old and extremely popular cultivars, such as ‘Fugenzo’, ‘Kanzan’, ‘Taizan-fukun’, ‘Yokihi’ among others, are thoroughly considered. If planted under favorable conditions, each of those cultivars becomes a plant treasure for any garden. The chapter on the Japanese garden cherries is a very suitable end to the book as it serves to remind us that nature is more complex than we could ever have imagined.

KUITERT with PETERSE have worked hard to make this a polished book. The treatise is exhaustive in its content, extending far beyond the Japanese flowering cherries. The nicely written text is greatly aided by more than 100 magnificent colour photographs along with 29 fascinating colour illustrations. It is simply a splendid volume that I am glad to have on my shelf and I know I will consult it frequently. Highly recommended book of the well-told Japanese flowering cherry tale.

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