

## CUTTINGS

A POTTED GUIDE TO...



**EARLY SALAD**  
Got a spare half hour? Clear a space and sow some salad today. Hearted varieties, loose-leaf or cut-and-come-again; you just sprinkle the seed finely into drills,

cover, water and wait.

A child could (and should) do it, but there are some things that help the plants along a bit. First, prepare your compost well, so that lumps are no larger than breadcrumbs and there are no weeds present. You can sow lettuce pretty much anywhere, but in general it helps to have it close by, so you can keep an eye on it. Raising it off the ground, either in a container or a raised bed, helps to deter pests. Once I've made the drills, I tend to water first and then sprinkle the seeds, so they don't end up floating about on top of the soil. Sow no more than half an inch deep, and once you've covered them up, don't forget to firm down the compost to remove air pockets.

One of the beauties of sowing salad from seed is that thinning becomes a joy rather than a massacre, because you can eat the seedlings you pull out. Sow another drill every few weeks, for months of abundance and a healthy reduction on your weekly shopping bill.

Laetitia Maklouf

## WE DIG THIS



This edging iron may look slightly scary but it's actually a godsend, as the spikes give more purchase than the usual smooth blade, easily slicing through

turf to give your lawn a crisp, clean outline. It comes in stainless steel (£23) and carbon steel (£15), with a long ash handle. Available at B&Q and garden centres.

kentandstowe.com

## BE INSPIRED

National Gardening Week begins tomorrow, with many participating gardens opening, free, on Friday (nationalgardeningweek.org.uk).

The gardens of Worth Abbey, near Turners Hill, West Sussex, are open to the public for the first time on Thursday and Sunday, 2pm-5pm. Entry £4.50 (ngs.org.uk).

cuttings@sunday-times.co.uk

Flowering cherries bring blizzards of colour to gardens that are still drab after the winter. **Stephanie Mahon** picks the sweetest varieties

**N**othing heralds the arrival of spring like a flowering cherry tree. Those frilly powder puffs of blossom are one of the joys of the season, a cheery sight to lift the spirits after the long winter.

The Japanese in particular hold the cherry in high regard, and even have a festival dedicated to it called Hanami, when people picnic under the blossoming trees. It isn't easy to find this sort of enthusiasm for the poor cherry here in the UK, however, as it has a reputation for being a brash attention seeker, a bit "tart's knickers". With our contemporary sensibilities, big old-fashioned trees with gaudy blossoms are more likely to make us sneer than smile.

However, perhaps the tide is turning for cherries. Nurseries are reporting a dramatic increase in sales over the past two or three years, as people have started to realise that they make fantastic garden trees. "Cherries have the biggest impact of any flowering tree, with a massive explosion of blossom," says the Chelsea gold-winning garden designer Andy Sturgeon. "It may all be over in a few short weeks, but it's worth it." He recommends planting one as a statement tree or focal point. "You don't have to get up close to appreciate them. Also, we shouldn't underestimate their autumn colour — they are right up there in the top 10 fiery oranges and yellows."

With more refined hybrids and new varieties coming on the market with smaller gardens in mind, there is now a cherry tree for everyone.

### Best for blossom

Peter Thomas, who manages the national collection of flowering cherries at Keele University, in Staffordshire, names *Prunus* 'Snow Goose' as his top tree for blossom. This narrow, upright cultivar has large, pure white, single flowers in April. "It grows to about 16ft high and 7ft-10ft wide — small but stunning."

Matthew Thomas agrees. He is sales manager at Frank P Matthews, a wholesale nursery that sells a wide range of cherries to nurseries and garden centres. He also singles out *P* 'Ukon', which produces unusual pale yellow, semi-double flowers in April.

### Best all-rounder

*P* 'Beni-yutaka' has fragrant, sugar-pink semi-double flowers in mid to late spring, and lovely crimson autumn colours. It is a large tree, though, with an ultimate height and spread of 25ft-40ft.

Matthew Hall, head gardener of Batsford Arboretum in Gloucestershire, which holds the national collection of Japanese cherries, recommends *P* 'Royal Burgundy' for year-round interest. A vase-shaped tree, it has rose-pink double flowers followed by spectacular



# Blossom



S & O Matthews, RM Floral/Carol Drake/Alamy

**Spring fever**  
Flowering cherries, including *Prunus* 'Pendula Rosea', main picture, are among the brightest stars of the season. Above, *P* 'Snow Goose'. Above right, *P* 'Shirotae'

scarlet foliage in autumn. "I also like the contrast of its dark purple leaves with other trees and shrubs," he says. It grows to about 20ft, with a spread of up to 16ft.

### Best for bigger gardens

Most cherries will grow quite big, and many need space to really shine. "I particularly like the wide-spreading *P* 'Tai-haku', which makes a fantastic canopy with age and is covered in large white flowers," Sturgeon says. Also known as the great white cherry, this cultivar has the whitest, most chaste petals of any cherry. It died out in its native Japan, and was presumed lost

forever, until a specimen was found by the plant collector Collingwood Ingram in a garden in Sussex in 1923. Every 'Tai-haku' in existence today comes from this single tree.

Another larger tree that is regularly recommended by growers and designers is *P* 'Shirotae'. "This distinctive variety grows vertically for a few years before spreading horizontally, with drooping branches," says Robert Vernon, owner of Bluebell Arboretum and Nursery, in Derbyshire. "It produces masses of large, white semi-double flowers in spring, and is very fetching, but needs a little space to develop a really good habit."

## How to grow cherry trees

Whether you decide to buy a container-grown tree or a cheaper, smaller bareroot, early spring is the best time to plant.

■ In a small garden, you need to be careful not to plant too close to the house, as the roots can damage foundations and drains.

■ Choose a sunny position. Cherries need light but can put up with some shade on one side. Make sure it is sheltered from strong winds. They like a well-drained acidic soil, but aren't fussy and will grow in most soils, even alkaline or clay. The one thing they can't stand is waterlogging.

■ Put some well-rotted manure in the hole at planting time and then top-feed with general fertiliser once a year in early spring. Keep a 3ft-6ft diameter free from grass around the base of the trunk while it settles in.

■ If your tree starts getting too big, most varieties can stand a good pruning. Keep an eye on growth, and remove any crowded branches.

■ Prunus are not difficult to grow and are usually untroubled by pests and diseases, but watch out for blossom-end rot, a fungus that turns the ends of the branches brown, and canker in older trees.

■ Being shallow-rooted trees, they will lift up the ground: if planted in a lawn, this can create a hazard for the mower. The falling petals may be pretty, like confetti, but make sure to clean them up off the lawn once you have enjoyed the show — if you don't, they can kill the grass.



## Enjoy your Garden

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### Best for winter interest

For a real off-season show, you need *P* × *subhirtella* 'Autumnalis Rosea', an autumn- and winter-flowering type that is loved by professionals. A small bushy tree, it has masses of shell-pink blossom, and flowers on and on, sometimes from November right through to April, depending on the weather.

### Best for fruit

If it is not the flowers but the fruit you want, Jonathan Fryer, the cherry expert at Brogdale, in Kent — home of the National Fruit Collection — suggests *P* *avium* 'Bradbourne Black' or the self-fertile 'Stella' as tasty choices, or 'Sunburst', which has dark red fruits that are large, juicy and firm.

For gardeners in more northerly or exposed locations, he recommends growing sour cherries, such as *P* *cerasus* 'Morello'. For small gardens, many varieties are available on a dwarfing rootstock, so won't need much pruning, and you can also try growing smaller fan-trained and cordon trees on a wall.

It is worth knowing that all fruiting cherry trees flower white and don't put on a show like the ornamental types. They will also attract birds, which are just as keen on fruit as we are, so you may have to protect them.

### Where to see

■ Batsford Arboretum, Gloucestershire — check the website for flowering updates for the national collection of Japanese cherries. [batsarb.co.uk](http://batsarb.co.uk)  
■ Brogdale Collection, Kent — visit for the Hanami Festival on Saturday, or book a Hanami picnic to enjoy under the trees in April. [brogdalecollections.org/hanami](http://brogdalecollections.org/hanami)  
■ Keele University, Staffordshire — blossoming times for the national collection of ornamental cherries are updated regularly. [keele.ac.uk/cherries](http://keele.ac.uk/cherries)

### Where to buy

[barcham.co.uk](http://barcham.co.uk); [bluebellnursery.com](http://bluebellnursery.com); [chewvalleytrees.co.uk](http://chewvalleytrees.co.uk); [majestictrees.co.uk](http://majestictrees.co.uk); [thornhayes-nursery.co.uk](http://thornhayes-nursery.co.uk)