

Sakura varieties

Even though we say the one word “sakura,” there are many different varieties of sakura in Japan. In plant taxonomy, sakura belongs to the rose family. They can be roughly divided into the wild species that have grown in the wild since ancient times (10 varieties), and cultivars, or cultivated varieties such as *somei yoshino* that have been bred by people for their ornamentation (approximately 100 varieties). Below is a summary of the various sakura found at spots on the Sakura Dream Road in Tohoku.

1. Wild species

1-1 *Edohigan*



Edohigan is a wild species native to Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu in Japan, and farther away on the Korean Peninsula as well as in China and Taiwan. The name means “equinox cherry from Edo” and comes from being often found in Edo, the old name for Tokyo, around the vernal equinox. The blossoms come out before the leaves appear and have small pinkish or white flowers. It is the longest-living species of flowering cherry tree, with some trees known to be over 1,000 years old. Most of the old trees designated as Natural Monuments are this species.

1-2 *Yamazakura*



Yamazakura is a wild species native to Honshu (west of Miyagi and Niigata prefectures), Shikoku, Kyushu, and the Korean Peninsula. The literal meaning is “mountain cherry,” as it grows in the mountains (or hills) near populated areas. It is a well-known wild flowering cherry tree in Japan, and has been closely related to Japanese life and culture since ancient times. Its blossoms are slightly pink and have five relatively small petals. The blossoms bloom almost simultaneously with the new sprouts of leaves. Up to the Meiji Era (1868–1912), *yamazakura*, not *somei yoshino*, was the most common species of ornamental sakura in Japan. The common name Yamazakura often refers simply to sakura growing in the mountains as opposed to cultivars such as *somei yoshino*, and can be confused with the species name *yamazakura*.

1-3 *Oyamazakura*



Oyamazakura is known as “Sargent’s cherry” in European countries. It is a wild species native to Hokkaido, Honshu (northern and central areas), and Shikoku (at high altitudes). The name literally means “big mountain cherry.” The leaves and blossoms are similar to but larger than those of the *yamazakura*. Another name for the variety is *beniyamazakura*, because its blossoms are deeper pink than *yamazakura* (*beni* means deep red). It is found more in northern areas and at higher altitudes than *yamazakura*. It is also called *ezoyamazakura* in Hokkaido (Ezo is the old name for Hokkaido).

1 - 4 *Kasumizakura*



Kasumizakura is a wild species mainly found on the Korean Peninsula as well as in China and native to Shikoku, Honshu, and Hokkaido in Japan. The name literally means “mist cherry.” When it blooms, the mountainside looks like it is covered in a spring mist of tiny, white flowers. Its distribution is in higher altitude zones than *yamazakura*. The two resemble each other in many ways, but if they grow in the same place, *kasumizakura* clearly blooms later than *yamazakura*. Typical of *kasumizakura* is the hairs found on its flower stalk, petiole, and often the underside of the leaf, which has given rise to another name, *keyamazakura* (“hairy mountain cherry”).

1 - 5 *Oshimazakura*



Oshimazakura is a wild species unique to Japan, and its natural distribution is limited. It is indigenous to Oshima and all other neighboring Izu Islands. The *oshimazakura* found in the southern part of the Izu Peninsula and the coastal region of the Boso Peninsula are considered to have been cultivated for firewood charcoal and since become wild. *Oshimazakura* is an insular form closely related to *yamazakura*, with a strong resistance to salty winds and air pollution. Its leaves and blossoms are similar to but larger than those of the *yamazakura*, and it is fragrant. These were important traits that led to it being the origin for many cultivar varieties. It is not only loved for its blossoms, but also appreciated in Japan for its edible leaves, which are used to make a rice cake sweet called *sakura-mochi*.

1 - 6 *Kanhizakura (Hikanzakura)*



Kanhizakura is a wild species native to southern China and Taiwan. This tree is almost a subtropical plant, and is also found on Ishigaki and Kume islands in Okinawa, although it has been suggested that these were imported from Taiwan. The literal meaning of its name is “cold scarlet cherry.” It has deep pink, bell-shaped flowers. Most sakura shed their petals after flowering, but this one drops its tubular petals with its calyx.

1 - 7 *Mamezakura*



Mamezakura is a wild species native mainly to the Fossa Magna area in central Honshu. It is found on Fuji, Hakone, Yatsugatake, and many other mountains, and is considered a species born from this volcanic area. The literal meaning of its name is “midget cherry.” The name comes from the fact that it forms thickets, and its flowers and leaves are smaller than other flowering cherries. Its distribution is in the Southern Alps, the Boso Peninsula, and the Izu Peninsula, but it is also called *fujizakura* because it is abundant at the foot of Mt. Fuji.

1 - 8 *Takanezakura*



Takanezakura is a wild species native to Hokkaido and central Honshu (sub-alpine zone to the alpine zone). It is also distributed in southern Sakhalin and Southern Kuril Islands. Its name literally means “cherry from the lofty peaks,” and another name for it is *minezakura* (“peak cherry”). On the main island of Honshu, this tree is found in mountains at altitudes above 1,500 meters. Farther north it is found across a wide region on mountains and in the plains of Hokkaido and Sakhalin. *Takanezakura* tolerates heavy snowfall and makes new leader branches from side shoots that stand up with a bend from the stem.

1 - 9 *Miyamazakura*



Miyamazakura is a wild species native to Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu, and is distributed in forests and forest edges from the cool temperate zone to the sub-arctic and sub-alpine zones. *Miyama* means “deep in the mountains.” Its flower shape is unique compared with other sakura in Japan, with blossoms bunched together like grain on a stalk, similar to primitive sakura. The blossoms are snow white. This variety also typically blooms later than other varieties of wild cherry trees.

1 - 10 *Chojizakura*



Chojizakura is a wild species that is unique to Japan, with distribution throughout the mountains of Honshu east of Hiroshima Prefecture and in parts of Kumamoto Prefecture. The name literally means “clove cherry.” *Chojizakura* bears white flowers very small in size. The calyx is tall and stout for the size of the blossoms. The sakura gets its name from the blossom’s resemblance to a clove.

2. Cultivars

2 - 1 *Somei yoshino*



Somei yoshino is the most popular flowering sakura in Japan and the main one seen throughout Japan. It blooms in early April with light pink, medium-sized, single-flowered blossoms. Toward the end of Edo Era (1603–1867), it was first called *yoshinozakura*, named after the famous Mt. Yoshino of flowering sakura. Later, the variety was found to be different from the sakura on Mt. Yoshino, and it was renamed *somei yoshino* to distinguish the two. Somei is the name of a village west of Tokyo where the species was first found. The tree grows fast, becoming a towering giant in 30 years. It is thought to be a cross between *oshimazakura* and *edohigan*. It is known for its blossoms blooming all at once before the leaves come out.

2-2 Shidarezakura



Shidarezakura are cultivars of *edohigan*. There are weeping-type *edohigan* sakura of many strains, with other traits no different from *edohigan*. They bloom in mid-March with light pink, small, single-flowered blossoms. The blossoms come out before the leaves. They are among the most common and beloved cherry trees in Japan and have been cultivated in Japan for many centuries. They have appeared in poems since the 12th century with the name *itozakura* ("thread cherry"). The Japanese common name *Shidarezakura* also simply means "weeping cherry" and can be confused with other weeping cherry varieties.

2-3 Benishidare



Benishidare (*benishidarezakura*) are cultivars of *edohigan*. They have deeper pink blossoms than *shidarezakura* but their other traits are no different, and there are several strains. They bloom in mid-March with blossoms from crimson to pink that are small in size and single-flowered. The blossoms come out before the leaves. *Benishidare* are called *itozakura* ("thread cherry") as well as *shidarezakura* ("weeping cherry").

2-4 Yaebenishidare



Yaebenishidare (*yaebenishidarezakura*) is a cultivar of *edohigan*, with branches that droop. It blooms in early April with light crimson, small-sized, double-flowered blossoms. The blossoms have 12 to 20 petals, which come out before the leaves. *Yaebenishidare*, known for their long and drooping branches, are called *itozakura* ("thread cherry") as well as *shidarezakura* ("weeping cherry"). Those at Heian-jingu Shrine in Kyoto are said to have been donated in the Meiji Era (1868–1912) by Yoji Endo, former mayor of Sendai. Another name for the cultivar is *endozakura*.

2-5 Gyoiko



Gyoiko is a cultivar of *satozakura*. In mid- to late April, it puts out double-layered, light yellowish-green blossoms with green streaks in the petals along with light brownish-green leaves. The blossoms have 11 to 15 petals, which have a stronger greenish tinge than those of the *ukon* variety. The petals bend back, revealing a crimson line in the center at full bloom. The name, recorded in the middle of the Edo Era (1603–1867), came from the *moegi* (green) color of aristocrats' clothing. The petals of this type of greenish flower are derived from leaves.

2-6 *Ukon*



Ukon is a cultivar of *satozakura* known for having deep yellow blossoms. It blooms in mid-April with light greenish-yellow, large-sized, double-flowered blossoms along with light brownish-green leaves. The blossoms have 10 to 18 petals. After full bloom, the outer base of the petals turns crimson. *Ukon* means turmeric in Japanese. The name, recorded in the middle of the Edo Era (1603–1867), came from the color of the flower, which is similar to dyes that use turmeric rhizome.

2-7 *Shiogamazakura*



Shiogamazakura is a cultivar of *satozakura* that blooms in late April with white, large-sized, double-flowered blossoms along with light brownish-green leaves. The blossoms have about 40 petals. It is a famous tree that has been known since the Edo Era (1603–1867) and has been cultivated in Kyoto since ancient times. The original cultivar was located at Shiogama-jinja Shrine in Shiogama City, Miyagi Prefecture. Today, children grafted from the original cultivar grow at Shiogama-jinja Shrine and were re-designated as a National Natural Monument in 1987.

2-8 *Kohigan (Higanzakura)*



Kohigan is a cultivar said to be a cross between *edohigan* and *mamezakura*. It blooms in early April with light crimson, small-sized, single-flowered blossoms. The flowers come out before the leaves. Usually cultivated, this sakura is rarely seen growing in the wild. Its height is as low as six meters, the branches are finely divided, and its blooming is also good, so it is suitable for growing at home. Its cut flowers are also used in flower arrangements.

2-9 *Tokaizakura*



Tokaizakura is a cultivar from the seedlings grown from *keitarozakura*. It blooms in mid-March, with light pink, small-sized, single-flowered blossoms. The flowers come out before the leaves. The tree is broom shaped, with aerial roots coming out from its trunk. It is characterized by many blossoms on small branches. This cultivar is used as a source of cut flowers in early spring. It is said to be a cross between *mamezakura* and *shinamizakura*. Other names for it are *keiozakura* and *gakunanzakura*.

2-1 0 *Kanzan*



Kanzan is a typical cultivar of *satozakura*. It blooms in mid- to late April with deep crimson, large-sized, double-flowered blossoms along with bronze-brown to bronze-green coppery leaves. The blossoms resemble tiny peonies and have 30 to 50 petals. Due to the abundance of its blossoms and its healthy, vigorous growth, *kanzan* is often planted in parks or along roads, and is a popular cherry outside Japan as well. *Sakurayu* (tea with cherry blossoms) served at celebratory occasions often uses salt-preserved *kanzan* blossoms.

2-1 1 *Fugenzo*



Fugenzo is a typical cultivar of *satozakura*. It blooms in late April with light pink, large-sized, double-flowered blossoms along with coppery brown leaves. The blossoms have 30 to 35 petals. This cultivar was first found growing during the Muromachi Era (1338–1573). *Fugenzo* means “Fugen-elephant,” referring to a white elephant, which in Buddhist paintings and sculpture was ridden by Fugen Bosatsu (Samantabhadra). The long phylloid pistils are associated with the elephant’s trunk or tusks. Thanks to the abundance of its blossom and its healthy, vigorous growth, *fugenzo* is often planted in parks or along roads. It is often planted in countries outside Japan as well.

2-1 2 *Shogetsu*



Shogetsu is a cultivar of *satozakura*. It blooms in mid- to late April with light pink, large-sized, double-flowered blossoms along with light green leaves. The blossoms have 25 to 35 petals, and are light pink in bud but bloom to a pure, snow white. The hanging blossoms, when completely opened, may be likened to little ballerinas. The white tiers of petals resemble frilled and pleated petticoats.

2-1 3 *Yokihi*



Yokihi is a cultivar of *satozakura*. It blooms in mid-April with light pink, large-sized, double-flowered blossoms along with light greenish-brown leaves. The blossoms have 15 to 20 petals. *Yokihi* is a historical woman of famed beauty at the Chinese imperial court. It is believed that this cultivar was a famous tree at Kofuku-ji Temple in Nara in the past. It is said that since it had an abundance of the many-petaled flowers with an excellent color, it was named after *Yokihi* by people in the early Edo Era (1603–1867).

2-1 4 *Beniyutaka*



Beniyutaka is a cultivar of *satozakura* created in 1961 after Masatoshi Asari crossed *matsumae-hayasaki* and *unryuin-beniyae* in Matsumae-cho, Hokkaido. It blooms in mid-April with crimson, large-sized, double-flowered blossoms along with light greenish-brown leaves. The blossoms come out before the leaves and have 15 to 18 petals. This lovely cultivar was named for its color and its abundant petals.

2 - 1 5 *Shikizakura*



Shikizakura is a cultivar of an interspecific hybrid of *mamezakura* and *edohigan*. The blossoms appear twice a year, in the fall and again in the spring (and often during warm spells in winter). The blossoms in spring tend to be larger than those in autumn. It blooms in October and early April with light pink, small-sized, single-flowered blossoms. The name signifies that it blooms in the four seasons, but it does not bloom in the summer.

2 - 1 6 *Fuyuzakura*



Fuyuzakura is a cultivar of an interspecific hybrid of *mamezakura* and *oshimazakura*. The blossoms appear twice a year, in the fall and again in the spring (and often during warm spells in winter). The blossoms in spring tend to be larger than those in autumn. It blooms from October to December and in early April with light pink, mid-sized, single-flowered blossoms. Its name literally means “winter cherry.” the flowers are larger than the other autumn cherries and are found in greater number throughout winter. Another name for the sakura is *kobazakura* (“little leaf cherry”).

2 - 1 7 *Jugatsuzakura*



Jugatsuzakura is a cultivar of an interspecific hybrid of *mamezakura* and *edohigan*. The blossoms appear twice a year, in the fall and again in the spring (and often during warm spells in winter). The blossoms in spring tend to be larger than those in autumn. It blooms from September to December in early April with light pink, mid-sized, double-flowered blossoms. Its name literally means “October cherry.” The blossoms have 15 to 20 petals and are found in greater number throughout winter. It is also called *oeshikizakura*, because it is in bloom on October 13, the anniversary of the death of the founder of the Nichiren sect of Buddhism, when the Oeshiki Ceremony is held.

3. Generic names

3 - 1 *Satozakura*

In a broad sense, *satozakura* is the common name of flowering cherries cultivated in populated areas as opposed to wild cherry species that grow on hills or mountains. In a narrow sense, it is the generic name for cultivars that cross *oshimazakura* with another kind of cherry tree such as *yamazakura* or *oyamazakura*. They have single, double, and chrysanthemum type blossoms and come in a variety of colors and shades. Some cultivars are fragrant, some have yellow-green petals, and some have more than 350 petals.

3 - 2 *Yaezakura*

Most wild cherry trees have blossoms with five petals. Some wild species and also a lot of cultivars have blossoms that consist of 10, 20, or more petals. In a broad sense, *yaezakura* is a generic name for double-flowered sakura that have more than five petals. Another name is *botanzakura*. In a narrow sense, *yaezakura* is a double-flowered cherry with 10 to 100 petals. Blossoms with 6 to 10 petals are called semi-double, and those with more than 100 petals are called chrysanthemum type. It is believed that the stamens of double-flowered blossoms became additional petals. Many *yaezakura* bloom later and longer than single-flowered sakura.

4. Common names

4-1 *Ubahigan (Ubahiganzakura)*

Ubahigan (ubahiganzakura) is the common name of *edohigan*, and refers to particularly old *edohigan*. The name means “old woman’s cherry.” The bare, leafless twigs on which the blossoms bloom resemble the toothless mouth of an old woman.

4-2 *Botanzakura*

Botanzakura is the common name for a double-flowered cherry that have more than five petals. The name literally means “peony cherry.” The name comes from the blossoms resembling peonies. In Japan, a double-flowered cherry is generally called *yaezakura*. On the other hand, horticultural varieties also have a cherry cultivar called *botan*. *Botan* blooms in late April with light pink, large-sized, double-flowered blossoms along with light green leaves. The blossoms have about 15 petals.