



Cultural Information: April

April is a special month in a child's life, since it marks the beginning of a new school year. Schools hold ceremonies in the first week of April to welcome new students. It is time for children to meet their new teachers and classmates. Flowering cherry trees often serve as a backdrop, suggesting a bright future.

Cherry blossoms are customarily recognized as the National Flower of Japan. (Chrysanthemums are also regarded the same way, but they mainly symbolize the Imperial family.) Every spring the weather forecasts keep track of *sakura zensen* (the cherry blossom front) and let the public know which region of the country has the trees in bloom. People visit parks, temples, and shrines to enjoy the blossoms and hold *hana-mi* (flower viewing) parties.

Since cherry blossoms remain in bloom for only a few days and are easily swept away with one strong wind, their fleeting beauty is also considered a symbol of purity and the transient nature of life.

In 1912, Japan gave more than 3,000 cherry trees as a gift of friendship to the United States. Most of them were planted on the shore of the Tidal Basin in Washington, DC. Another gift of 3,800 trees was made in 1965. The annual National Cherry Blossom Festival is one of the DC's most well-known rites of spring.

