

This podcast was inspired by Kimiyo from Japan who recently E-mailed me a photograph of the cherry blossoms on the street where she lives. She told me that, at the moment, the wave of blossoms is moving through Japan, and so she decided to capture it on film and send it to me. Thanks Kimiyo! Blossoms are dear to my heart because they are a central subject of the area where I live. Without blossoms, orchards cannot produce fruit, of course. I decided to investigate blossoms in Japan, and I ended up learning a lot. The word for cherry blossom is 'sakura'. It is such an anticipated event in Japan that the national weather bureau makes a forecast, and charts the progress of the blossoming, as it moves from the south to the north. The first cherry blossoms in Japan start in January, in Okinawa. As the season continues, the wave of blossoms moves slowly up the country, reaching the capital, Tokyo, in about the beginning of April. It finishes in Hokkaido a few weeks later. There are flower viewing parties, where people will eat under a blossoming cherry tree, and also tea drinking rituals, and artistic events. In most places, the trees are also lit up at night. Because so many hundreds of thousands of these trees were planted in Japan, the season is one of extreme beauty. For the Japanese, cherry blossoms represent love, affection, and good fortune, as well as mortality. Cherry trees are native to Japan, Korea, and China, Japan having about 200 different kinds. The mass planting of these trees started in the eighth century, and the tradition of blossom viewing, practiced in China, became part of life in Japan. Admiration of these beautiful trees is international, of course, with countries all over the world celebrating and enjoying this flowery display. The Japanese government has made a gift of flowering cherry trees to the U.S. on several occasions, and so now, they are enjoyed here also. One of the biggest collections is found in Macon, Georgia where there are over 300,000 trees. Even if they don't produce fruit, the short season of pleasure they give us is an inspiring annual event.

Grammar notes.

Useful common expressions and vocabulary: to end up, a forecast, to chart.

1. I tried and tried to write my essay last night; I ended up just taking a bath and going to bed.
2. I heard the forecast: stormy weather and snow.
3. The pirates charted their course using the stars.