

Birds & Blooms

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8 Must-See Flower Festivals for 2018

Fill your calendar with events that feature the sweet scent of spring.

By Sheryl DeVore

If the snowstorms of winter are making you dream of the pink cherry blossoms, colorful tulips and fragrant lilacs of spring, it's time to plan ahead for when the frost finally melts. Jump right into the new year with floral celebrations that begin in late winter and run through early summer. Mother Nature decides when blossoms reach their peak, so no matter which festival is calling your name, plan to stay several days for the best chance at seeing the most blooms. Let the countdown to spring begin!

1. Tulip Time Festival



photo credit: John McCormick/Shutterstock

Tulip Time Festival, Holland, Michigan

Where: Holland, Michigan

When: May 5-13

Nowhere in North America can you see more tulips in one place than in Holland, Michigan, where nearly 5 million Dutch favorites burst forth in a riot of May color. Stroll the 6 miles of Tulip Lanes or take a trolley tour. Watch parades featuring Dutch dancers dressed in traditional costumes and see wooden shoes being made by hand. There's even a fireworks show. The International Festival and Events Association lists Tulip Time as one of the top 20 events in the world. Don't miss it!

More info: tuliptime.com

2. Camellia Walks at Middleton Place



photo credit: Benita5/Pixabay

Where: Charleston, South Carolina

When: Mid-February to March

See camellias that are centuries old blooming in winter at Middleton Place, a National Historical Landmark and the oldest landscaped garden in the United States. In 1786, French botanist Andre Michaux brought the first camellias in the U.S. to Middleton Place. Today, thousands of individual plants representing more than 1,000 cultivars grace the grounds from mid-February to late March. Walk along the paths to view the blooms at your own pace, or register for a guided tour or workshop.

More info: middletonplace.org

3. International Cherry Blossom Festival



photo credit: Uriel Soberanes/Unsplash

Where: Macon, Georgia

When: March 16-25

The Yoshino cherry trees in Macon, Georgia, have humble beginnings. A local businessman discovered one growing in his backyard in 1949 and shared cuttings with his neighbors. Now Macon has 300,000 of them! Residents celebrate blossom time with a festival that includes free concerts, a parade and a bed race, in which people wearing blossoms in their hair traverse the streets on mattresses.

More info: cherryblossom.com

4. National Cherry Blossom Festival



photo credit: Vizual Studio/Shutterstock

National Cherry Blossom Festival, Washington, D.C.

Where: Washington, D.C.

When: March 20-April 15

In 1912, the Japanese people gave the U.S. more than 3,000 cherry trees. The National Cherry Blossom Festival followed in 1935, and it now spans four weekends and attracts more than 1.5 million visitors a year. Today more than 3,700 trees of 16 different varieties grow along the Potomac River and near national monuments. See them on foot or hit the water to view the lovely pink blossoms via water taxi, cruise boat or paddleboat. Shutterbugs can even take camera safaris with professional photographers. Other highlights of the festival include a cherry blossom parade and a Japanese street festival.

More info: nationalcherryblossomfestival.org

5. Lighted Dogwood Trail



photo credit: Ashley Bean/Unsplash

Where: Paducah, Kentucky

When: April

In early spring, dogwoods brighten the Kentucky landscape with their four-petaled flowers. Walk, drive or bike past historic Paducah homes along a 12-mile trail lined with dogwood and other flowering trees, such as redbud and weeping cherry. At night, parts of the trail are illuminated. The Library of Congress lists the trail in its Local Legacies project, which recognizes unique local traditions. Events include an art and photography exhibit, and \$1 trolley rides along the trail.

More info: paducahky.gov/dogwood-trail

6. Rochester Lilac Festival



photo credit: Anton Darius Sollers/Unsplash

Where: Rochester, New York

When: May 12-21

Celebrate lilacs at this 10-day festival in Highland Park, where 1,200 plants make up the nation's largest collection of these aromatic blooms. One of the 500 varieties you'll see is the white Frederick Law Olmsted lilac, named after the landscape architect who developed the park. The festival includes a parade, juried arts and crafts show, live music, and vendors selling lilac soaps and perfumes.

More info: rochesterevents.com/lilac-festival

7. Mackinac Island Lilac Festival



photo credit: Craig Sterken/Shutterstock

Lilac Festival, Mackinac Island, Michigan

Where: Mackinac Island, Michigan

When: June 8-17

The climate here helps lilacs grow larger and live longer than in other places in the U.S. In fact, some of the lilacs blooming today were planted during the Victorian era. No cars are allowed on the island, but you can walk or take a horse-drawn carriage tour of flowering lilacs through streets of historic homes. Attend lilac-growing seminars and listen to folk music amidst the sweet scent.

More info: mackinacisland.org

8. Peony Festival



photo credit: Mira Bozhko/Unsplash

Where: Oshawa, Ontario

When: June 9-10

Immerse yourself in peonies at the Oshawa Valley Botanical Gardens in June, when 300 varieties burst into bloom. The annual two-day festival is timed to coincide with peak bloom time. Meander through an exhibit showing artist interpretations of the classic plant, and sit in on a peony-judging contest while Canadian Peony Society members critique the blooms.

More info: oshawa.ca

4 FUN FLOWER FACTS

1. Ants love the scent of peonies, but it's a myth that they help open blossoms.
2. One of Thomas Jefferson's favorite blooms was the lilac.
3. After Japan sent cherry trees to the U.S., the government reciprocated by sending flowering dogwood trees.
4. The buds and leaves of camellia plants have been used to make tea for over 3,000 years.

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