

Omura-Zakura Cherry Blossoms

The Omura-zakura (*Cerasus serrulata* 'Mirabilis'), a variety of double-petaled Sato-zakura cherry blossom, was discovered in Omura Park in the twentieth century. It is distinguished by large blooms with two layers of between 60 and 200 tightly packed petals. The flowers range from 3 to 5 centimeters in diameter, and each bloom is protected by ten leaf-like sepals. They differ from the most common variety of cherry in Japan, the Somei Yoshino (*Prunus x yedoensis*), the flowers of which have only five single petals. Double-petaled cherry blossoms were first cultivated several centuries ago.

The Omura-zakura variety was discovered by chance on the grounds of Omura Shrine in Omura Park in 1941 by Toyama Saburo (1902–1986), a local schoolteacher and botanist. According to local accounts, Toyama was admiring the double-petaled Sato-zakura blooms on the grounds of Omura Shrine when he noticed what he first believed to be an unusual blossom, with around twice as many petals as a standard Sato-zakura variety. Closer inspection led him to conclude that it was a new variety of cherry tree, which was subsequently given the name Omura for the city where it was discovered.

There are now several hundred Omura-zakura trees in Omura Park, all cultivated from the tree that Toyama first identified. The city holds a cherry blossom festival in the park between late March and early April. The Omura-zakura tree in front of Omura Shrine is designated a National Natural Monument.