

The Defiant Beauty of Cherry Blossom Season

Festivals might be canceled and gardens closed, but you can see some trees from a safe distance.

By JULIA CARMEL and TAMMY LA GORCE

The season of pink has arrived.

Although the coronavirus outbreak has made it difficult to enjoy the cherry trees, it's still possible to admire the blossoms from a safe distance, either by scrolling through online cherry trackers, strolling through a park that is still open, finding the perfect view through a closed gate or even driving through New Jersey.

At Brooklyn Botanic Garden, a Sakura Matsuri, or cherry blossom festival, has been an annual tradition since 1982.

But this year the garden's 214 cherry trees will bloom without an audience. The festival, which can draw some 70,000 people over one weekend, has been canceled. The garden, closed.

"It's sad to say, but it's absolutely gorgeous there," said Ronni Bendavid-Val, the director of horticulture at the garden. "Everything holds its breath for a minute between winter and spring, and then there's this explosion of spring."

The cherry blossom season is fleeting, with most blossoms erupting and returning to dormancy within the span of a month. Most of the cherry trees at the 52-acre Brooklyn Botanic Garden, including all 76 lining its Cherry Esplanade, are Kanzan trees. "So when they bloom, they bloom all at the same time," Ms. Bendavid-Val said.

Passers-by can catch a glimpse of several trees — most of which are hidden by a wrought-iron fence that surrounds the garden — through the Eastern Parkway entrance. The blossoms on the Cherry Esplanade can also be seen if you walk up the hill near the parking lot between the Brooklyn Museum and the garden on Washington Avenue. At the top, there is a spot to peek inside the grounds.

The garden has been updating its Cherry-Watch tracker daily and is planning to share videos from past festivals on April 23 and 26 — the weekend the festival was meant to take place. There are also virtual tours available on its Instagram and Facebook pages. The New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx, also closed, offers a cherry tracker, too.

"It's really amazing to hear what the garden sounds like," said Elizabeth Reina-Longoria, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden's director of marketing and communications. "You're just hearing so many birds and nature sounds all around you that you wouldn't necessarily hear at this time of year with lots of other people around."

In Newark, Branch Brook Park has one of the largest collections of Japanese cherry

A celebrated 'explosion of spring' this year without an audience.

trees in the United States.

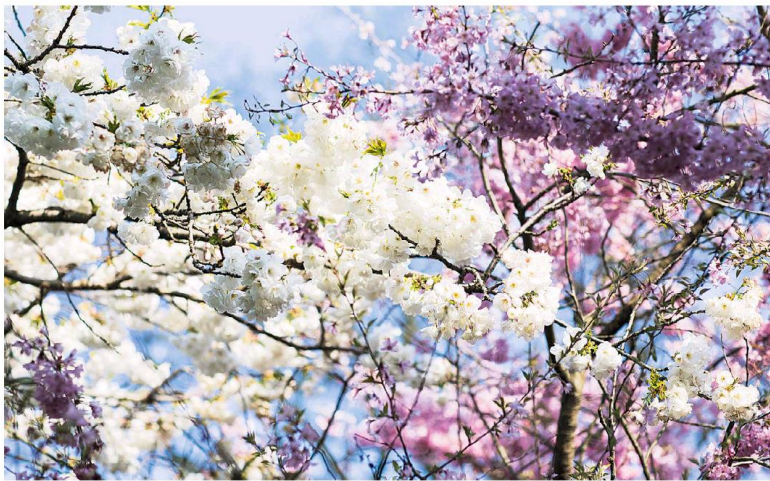
"We always say that Branch Brook Park is the lungs of the city of Newark," said Thomas Dougherty, chief operating officer of Care of the Park, part of the Branch Brook Park Alliance.

Sadly, Branch Brook, like the botanical gardens of New York City, is also closed. But driving through the park's majestic display of more than 5,000 cherry trees is still an option.

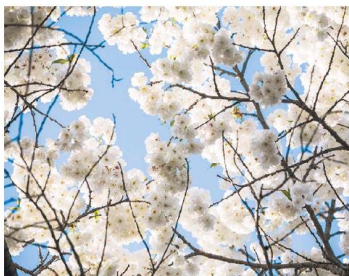
Branch Brook Drive, which starts at Clifton Street in Newark and winds its way through the 360-acre park to Washington Street in neighboring Bellevue, is the best route to take, said Anthony Puglisi, director of the Essex County office of public information. Stopping for photographs or to play around the trees isn't allowed, however.

The drive provides a sense of why the 360-acre park's \$50 million renovation, completed in 2014, is a point of pride for Newark.

Conceived by Frederick Law Olmsted in 1867, Branch Brook, which opened in 1895, might not be as famous as some of Olmsted's other feats (Central Park or Prospect



ESSEX COUNTY



PHOTOGRAPHS BY KRISTEN LACE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Park), but it offers a "quiet beauty," said Barbara Bell Coleman, co-chair of the Branch Brook Park Alliance.

In a nonquarantine situation, the park provides an "emotional, spiritual, physical respite" for Newark residents, Ms. Coleman said. "In one area, older men are fishing. In another, people are playing bocce."

To keep Newark locals connected with their beloved park, a new initiative called Seeds of Hope, reminiscent of Lady Bird

Johnson's 1960s-era wildflower beautification project, has been announced. Volunteers are cultivating plants at home and documenting the process online. When the park reopens, the specimens will be replanted in Branch Brook's formal gardens.

"The idea is that, no matter where you are, you can get engaged with other people who are passionate about Branch Brook Park," Mr. Dougherty said. "And all it offers our community."

OTHER DISPLAYS

Locations in the city with smaller collections of cherry blossoms include Roosevelt Island, Riverside Park between 100th and 125th Streets on the Upper West Side, the reservoir in Central Park, Silver Lake Park on Staten Island and around the former World's Fair site at Flushing Meadows Corona Park.

A Refuge for Serenity in Somber Times

Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn extends its hours for cooped-up New Yorkers.

By ANDREW COTTO

Green-Wood Cemetery, a national historic landmark in Brooklyn, has extended its visiting hours, giving New Yorkers in the era of the coronavirus another option for serenity, exercise and fresh air.

Its main entrance, on Fifth Avenue at 28th Street, marked by an elaborate Gothic archway, is now open daily from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Founded in 1838 on nearly 500 acres, Green-Wood can seem more like a nature reserve than a cemetery. There are hills and valleys, over 7,000 trees, glacial ponds, rocky outcroppings, and at this time of year, bright and colorful flowers.

Cobbled paths and serpentine lanes weave through statues, monuments and mausoleums, marking the final resting places of New York luminaries like Louis Comfort Tiffany, Leonard Bernstein and Jean-Michel Basquiat.

"Green-Wood was designed to be a different kind of experience," said Lisa Albert, vice president for development and programming at the cemetery. "It's a more contemplative, less recreational, one, intended to connect people with nature, and we are especially happy now to serve as a green



SARAH BLEISHER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

space for people to get away."

The cemetery prohibits any form of exercise other than walking, distinguishing it from Brooklyn's other major green space, Prospect Park, which has been reemerging with runners and bicyclists. Alas, dogs are not permitted in the cemetery.

Green-Wood has three other entrances. The one in Sunset Park, at Fourth Avenue and 28th Street, is open daily from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m.

The Fort Hamilton Parkway entrance, at Fort Hamilton Parkway and Micieli Place, and the Prospect Park West Entrance, at

Only walking is allowed at Green-Wood Cemetery, distinguishing it from Brooklyn's other major green space, Prospect Park.

Inside the gates, space for people to just get away.

Ninth Avenue and 20th Street, are open from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekdays and 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekends.

Even with the increase in foot traffic of cooped-up New Yorkers, the pastoral landscape allows for strolling at the recommended six-foot distance from others.

James Lutz, 30, and Dana Gallant, 27, completed an hour-and-a-half tour around the cemetery's southern flank. "It's a respite from the chaos," Mr. Lutz said. "And social distancing is capable here."

Ms. Gallant said, "We typically come here once a month, but we plan on coming back once a week, at least." Green-Wood also has the highest natural elevation in Brooklyn. Ezeze Galindo, 32, who lives in the neighborhood and is a cemetery regular, likes to sit on a bench and have her morning coffee there, under a canopy of pine and oak trees, while taking in views of the waterfront, the Statue of Liberty and Lower Manhattan.

She has certainly noticed the uptick in visitors.

"Normally it would be my spot where I'd relax and just kind of have my moment without people passing by," Ms. Galindo said. "Now it's a little different, but with everything going on, it makes sense."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KRISTEN LACE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

