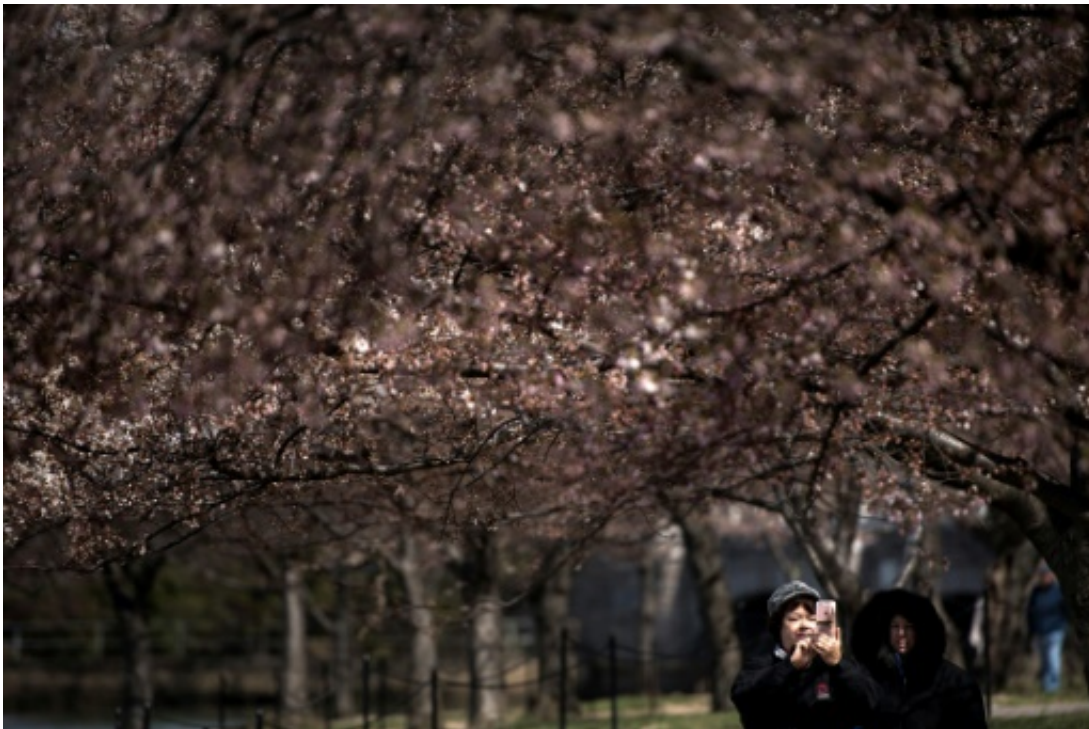


Will March snow ruin Washington's cherry blossoms?

March 14 2017



Cherry and other trees close to bloom are seen along the tidal basin on the National Mall on March 13, 2017 in Washington, DC

As the northeastern United States braces for the biggest snowstorm of the winter, officials in Washington had other concerns—the fate of the city's prized cherry blossoms, which draw hordes of tourists every year.

"There is no risk for the trees themselves. They've seen snow, [cold](#)

[temperatures](#), wind," National Park Service (NPS) spokesman Mike Litterst told AFP on Monday.

"The concern right now is for the blossoms, not really because of the snow but we are very concerned about the temperatures. (...) The blossoms are so far advanced," he said.

Damage begins when the temperature drops to about 27 degrees Fahrenheit (-2.5 degrees Celsius), Litterst explained.

Washington was under a winter storm warning Monday night, with the mercury possibly plunging into the 20s. Up to eight inches (20 centimeters) of snow was possible in some areas, along with strong winds—also not a good thing for the cherry blossoms.

The NPS had been predicting "peak bloom" of the roughly 3,000 cherry trees around Washington's Tidal Basin—the time when 70 percent of the Yoshino trees are in full flower—would be sometime between March 19 and March 22.

Hundreds of thousands of people come to the US capital to see the clouds of pink flowers each year. The National Cherry Blossom Festival is a top tourist draw, bringing in tens of millions of dollars.

The Yoshino [trees](#), one of the 12 varieties planted around the Tidal Basin, are the most at risk, Litterst said, as they are at a critical stage in the blooming process and especially susceptible to cold and frost.

Only those flowers still in their protective buds are likely to survive the storm, the spokesman said.

The National Cherry Blossom Festival commemorates the 1912 gift of roughly 3,000 [cherry trees](#) to Washington by the mayor of Tokyo, as a

symbol of US-Japanese friendship.

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