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Early to the Party: Unusually Warm Winter Pushes up the Arrival of Spring Blossoms At The New York Botanical Garden

NYBG Gardeners Say Magnolias, Daffodils, and Other Festive Early-Spring Flowers are About Three Weeks Ahead of Schedule



Daffodils are already blooming at The New York Botanical Garden.

Bronx, NY—Following one of the balmiest winters ever in New York City, the landscape of The New York Botanical Garden is coming to life much earlier than usual this year, with magnolias, daffodils, and early-blooming varieties of cherry trees showing off their spring finery in a welcome display of color.

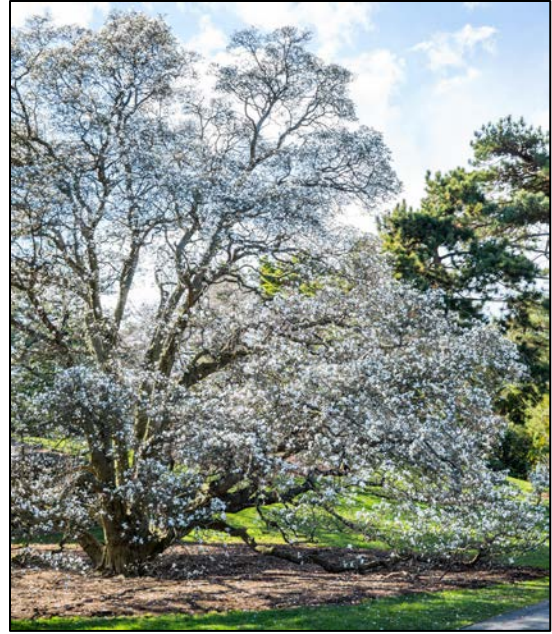
On average, the spring-flowering plants at the Botanical Garden's 250-acre landmark site are blooming about three weeks early, according to the Garden's expert horticultural curators. That can be attributed to the fact that the winter of 2015–2016 saw average temperatures that were the second highest on record in New York City, according to the National Weather Service. An unusually strong El Niño, a pattern of warm-water currents in the Pacific Ocean that affects weather around the world, has been blamed—or credited—for the warm winter.

"It's important to look at this early spring in the context of the recent winter, which was unusually warm," said Brian Sullivan, the Garden's Vice President for Gardens, Landscape, and Outdoor Collections. "I am sure that many people will remember that we were running around in shorts and t-shirts this past Christmas. While we did have some cold temperatures, overall it was relatively mild this winter in the New York region. That means the soil did not maintain a

freeze for any prolonged period of time. Plants respond more quickly to the coming spring with the warmer soil temperatures.”

The arrival of spring blooms may seem even earlier this year because the last two winters in the New York metropolitan area were unusually cold, leading to late springs. Last year, for example, spring blooms appeared nearly three weeks later than average.

This year, however, irises, hellebores, glory-of-the-snow, *Scilla* and even some early tulips are already blooming. Sullivan said Garden staff have been busy planting pansies since mid-March.



Magnolia in bloom on Perennial Garden Way at The New York Botanical Garden.

The Garden's magnificent magnolias are in full flower, according to Todd Forrest, Arthur Ross Vice President for Horticulture and Living Collections. Depending on the weather, their fragrant flowers should last until early April.

Of course, spring wouldn't be spring without daffodils. The record-setting warm winter has pushed them into early growth, with early-blooming cultivars already fluttering in the breeze in Daffodil Valley, along Daylily/Daffodil Walk, and on Daffodil Hill. The flowers should continue to open into the early part of April, and their appearance on the spring stage is even more anticipated than usual this year. That's because 150,000 daffodil bulbs were planted last November to bloom alongside the historic daffodil display on Daffodil Hill, part of the Garden's celebration of its 125th anniversary in 2016.

Early-blooming cultivars of cherry trees are already flowering in Daffodil Valley and by the Rock Garden. They are likely to reach their peak by the end of March, just as the colorful blossoms in the Garden's Cherry Valley begin to appear.

In the Azalea Garden, some rhododendrons are already in full flower, to be followed soon by other, later-blooming varieties, which will turn that collection into a riot of vivid reds, pinks, blues, and whites well into spring.

This is also the inaugural year for the Garden's newly renovated and expanded lilac collection. Many of the earlier-blooming lilacs have already broken bud, and their new growth has begun to expand. Their flowers are likely to start opening in the final days of March or early April, with peak bloom on track to arrive in mid-to-late April, approximately three weeks early this year.

Although a stroll around the Garden provides visual evidence that spring has indeed sprung, an important, ongoing research effort confirms that impression. Since 2002, staff, students, and volunteers have been collecting phenology data—the timing of budding, fruiting, leafing out and so on—for many plant species in the Garden’s 50-acre Thain Family Forest, the largest remaining old-growth forest in New York City.

Native red maples, whose small red or orange flowers are harbingers of spring across the eastern half of the United States, set a record this year when a Garden staff member spotted open flowers on March 2. That is the earliest date for red maples to be in flower in the Forest since the phenology project began 14 years ago.

That information is logged in the online database of the USA National Phenology Network, which collects data from researchers, students and volunteers nationwide, building a long-term set of plant information that over time may lead to a better understanding of climate impacts on native flora.

Of course, the weather—which, as gardeners know, is always fickle—is especially changeable at this time of year, as the snow on the first day of spring this year amply illustrates. Cooler weather and overcast days could push back the anticipated blooming times. Also, the Garden’s horticultural curators caution local gardeners that if the area experiences a hard frost—temperatures below about 30 degrees for a few days—early blooms could be damaged.

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The New York Botanical Garden is a museum of plants located at Bronx River Parkway (Exit 7W) and Fordham Road. It is easy to reach by Metro-North Railroad or subway. The Garden is open year-round, Tuesday through Sunday and Monday federal holidays, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. The best way to enjoy the Garden is with the *All-Garden Pass*, which includes admission to the grounds as well as to seasonal gardens, exhibitions, and attractions such as the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory, Everett Children’s Adventure Garden, and Tram Tour. For ticket pricing, please check our Web site. For more information, please call 718.817.8700 or visit nybg.org

The New York Botanical Garden, 2900 Southern Boulevard, Bronx, New York 10458

The New York Botanical Garden is located on property owned in full by the City of New York, and its operation is made possible in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. A portion of the Garden’s general operating funds is provided by The New York City Council and The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The Bronx Borough President and Bronx elected representatives in the City Council and State Legislature provide leadership funding.

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