

BEIJING

北京

Postal Subscription
Code 82-777

Published Monthly
on the 25th Day

Issue April 2026

Telling Beijing's
Stories

Flowers in Bloom • A City Revealed

ISSN 2095-736X



9 772095 736263



Photo by Zhao Shuhua

北京
(BEIJING)

Issue 4, 2026 (Vol. 586)

Supervision

Publicity Department of the CPC Beijing Municipal Committee

Sponsors

Information Office of the People's Government of

Beijing Municipality

Beijing International Communication Center

The Beijing News

The issue supported by

Beijing Municipal Forestry and Parks Bureau

Publisher

The Beijing News

Editor in Chief

Ru Tao

Executive Editor in Chief

An Dun

Editors

Wang Wei

[United States] Brad Green, [United States] Anne Ruisi

Photo Editors

Zhang Xin, Tong Tianyi

Art Editor

Zhao Lei

Cover Creative Design

Zhang Xin

Service of Translation

Wang Wei, Zhang Hongpeng

Photos Courtesy of

Xinhua News Agency; veg.com; 58pic.com;

IC photo; tuchong.com; AIGC

Distribution

The Beijing News

Address

F1, Building 10, Fahuayanli, Tiyuguan Lu,

Dongcheng District, Beijing

Tel

+86 10 6715 2380

Fax

+86 10 6715 2381

Printing

Beijing Dida Colored Printing Co., Ltd

Postal Subscription Code

82-777

Publishing Date

April 25, 2026

Price

38 yuan

International Standard Serial Number

ISSN 2095-736X

China National Standard Serial Number

CN10-1908/G0

E-mail

Beijingydx@btmbeijing.net

Contents photo by

Zhang You

Contents

- 5 Flowers in Bloom ·
A City Revealed
- 8 Meeting a City with
Blooming Branches
- 14 Enjoying Gardens with
Vibrant Blossoms
- 22 Strolling in Serene
Temples with Blooms
- 28 Encountering Parks Blanketed
with Flowers
- 36 Exploring the Countryside
with Breathtaking Scenery
- 42 Memories of the City
- 48 Culture Express



Flowers in Bloom · A City Revealed

Text by Gao Yuan Photos by Tong Tianyi, Zhang You

April brings the beauty of Beijing into full bloom. From hutongs (alleys) to gardens, temples, mountains and plains, a riot of flowers paints the capital's vibrant spring landscape.

Beijingers cherish spring outings, treating the viewing of flowers as a romantic encounter. This refined pastime remains a quintessential leisure pursuit across the capital.

Beijing's garden city brings blossoms anew. The joy of foliage and flowers enchants residents, becoming an integral and vibrant part of daily spring life as this refined pleasure endures.



Shilipu's Peach Blossom Stream features "Beijing's earliest mountain peaches," while the Liangma River International Style Waterfront, with its seasonal blooms, has become a scenic social media favourite.

Sanlihe's clear waters weave through the streets of Qianmen. Dongsi in Dongcheng District and Shuguang in Haidian District are garden-style neighbourhoods, offering the immediate enjoyment of flowers.

Beijing's Second, Third and Fourth Ring Roads feature the "hundred urban galleries" and "Yueji (China Rose) Necklaces," with autumn foliage and year-round blossoms creating picturesque commuting routes.

The Beijing Municipal Administrative Centre in Tongzhou District has seen a significant increase in green space, driven by the development of Central Green Forest Park, the Heritage Site Park at the Ancient Government Seat of Luxian County and the Ring Road High Line Park.

Beijing's 2024 "Garden City" initiative brings expanded green spaces and environmental refinement, transforming the urban landscape.

Li Xiaoguang, Director of the Forest Chief Scheme and Garden City Division at the Beijing Municipal Forestry and Parks Bureau, presented figures highlighting the city's steady progress towards becoming a garden city. Two phases of a million *mu* afforestation project (approximately 0.0667 hectares per *mu*) have together added 2.19 million *mu* of green space, an area comparable to 219 Beijing Olympic Forest Parks. More than 100 million trees of diverse species have been planted, raising forest coverage from 40 percent in 2015 to the current 45 percent. Forty large-scale forests, each exceeding 10,000 *mu*, now contribute to an annual carbon sink capacity of 10 million tons, equivalent to offsetting the yearly emissions of 3.3 million sedan cars. In 2025, Beijing was added a further 200 hectares of park green

space and 1,000 kilometres (km) of greenways, while more than 100 varied green spaces were already developed or upgraded, including garden city demonstration neighbourhoods, "urban galleries," urban forests, leisure parks, pocket parks, other small green spaces and accessible parks designed for all age groups. In the past five years alone, over 700 new green spaces have been created, ensuring that over 92 percent of residents can reach a park or green space within 500 metres of their homes and enjoy greenery just outside their doorstep. The continued expansion of green space across the capital is steadily enhancing the quality and liveability of Beijing's urban environment.

Beijing's "China Rose Necklaces" transform ring roads into vibrant spectacles during their seven-month flowering season. Since the 1990s, the city's official flower has been cultivated along these routes. Today, over 300 km feature 20 million blooms, gracing the capital with serene elegance from late spring to autumn.

Beijing aims to become a world-class, harmonious and liveable capital. Whether as a forest metropolis or a network of a thousand gardens, each step advances ecological civilisation through green development initiatives.

Beijing's green transformation brightens streets with blossoms, enriches foliage and introduces vibrant pocket parks tucked within streets and hutongs. Residents delight in the upgraded environment, enjoying a four-season tapestry of fresh spring hues, lush summer green, autumnal gold and winter's silvery white across the city.

In the past, people planned their outings around the blooming calendar, spending the year admiring flowers. Today, flower-viewing is no longer confined to ancient temples or famed gardens. Residents can simply step outside and enjoy blossoms across the city's expansive green spaces and clusters of parks. Many people living in Beijing are feeling: "Greenery not only

extends from the mountains and plains into urban areas, but also permeates every aspect of residents' lives."

Today, Beijing boasts more than a thousand parks, each unfurling successive waves of colour as flowers bloom in rapid succession. From the peach-and-willow paths along the West Embankment of the Summer Palace, through the Crabapple Blossom Stream winding within the Dadu City Wall Relics Park, to an avenue with Princess trees in the Beijing Economic-Technological Development Area, the capital's long springtime panorama is already on full display. For those wishing to escape the city crowds, the suburban mountains and plains offer their own charms: lilacs at Jietai Temple in Mentougou District exude a subtle fragrance; Erqiao magnolias perfume the air at Tanzhe Temple; Liujiadian Township in Pinggu District is carpeted with 200,000 *mu* of peach blossoms covering hills and fields; and 10,000 *mu* of pear blossoms at Panggezhuang in Daxing District

resemble a veil of snow and mist. Each locale presents a distinctive and memorable beauty.

This spring, Beijing welcomes three world-class horticultural events: the Beijing International Flower Show, Hortiflorexpo IPM Beijing 2026 and the Beijing Spring Flower Exhibition. Across the city, countless blossoms reach their peak, perfuming the streets. Visitors can stroll through seas of bloom, partaking in a garden feast where nature and culture intertwine, and savour the romance and splendour of spring woven into the poetic tapestry of a garden city.

Beijing, now home to a thousand gardens, is moving steadily towards its vision of a true garden city and a genuinely liveable metropolis. The age-old Chinese ideal of "dwelling among woods and fields, strolling beneath leafy shade, reclining amid blossoms and grass" is gradually taking shape, woven into the broader blueprint guiding Beijing's garden city development.

Meeting a City with Blooming Branches

Text by Zhang Jian, Ma Kai
Photos by Zhang Xin, Tong Tianyi, Gong Yuexian, Zhao Shuhua, Wu Hui

In previous times, Beijingers would need to visit parks in order to admire spring blossoms. In today's capital city, spring has spilled beyond garden walls and is visible along streets and waterways. Through urban renewal and ecological progress, from late-20th-century afforestation to landscaping upgrades around Beijing 2008 and more recent "Garden City" initiatives, roads now glow with ribbons of flowers and riverbanks are blanketed with blossoms. Flowers are no longer confined to designated spaces; they have woven themselves into the fabric of everyday life.

This spring, Beijing is writing a floral story along its roads and alleyways.

Spring Blossoms: A Roadside Riot of Colours

At Dongbianmen, along Beijing's East Second Ring Road, winter jasmine spills down the underpass slopes, transforming the utilitarian interchange into a striking seasonal scene. From afar, the blossoms resemble golden cascades flowing from elevated roadways; up close, a faint fragrance greets passersby as spring quietly unfolds. Cars glide beneath while pedestrians pause and look up, as if spring were flowing naturally from the city's very fabric.

The beginning of spring in Beijing is most evident along its roadsides. Winter jasmine, the earliest herald, quietly blooms as early as February, while winter's chill still lingers, spilling gently along walls, waterfront paths and greenways.

In the city, winter jasmine is not only a common plant in gardens but also a humble, ever-present bloom in daily life. More than a flower, it serves as time's gentle herald, the first to appear, its bright yellow quietly signalling that winter has passed and spring is approaching.

Ancient Chinese writers long cherished winter jasmine. Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907) poet Linghu Chu (AD 766–837) marvelled at its blossoms; Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) scholar Zhao Zhixin (1662–1744) praised its resilience; modern scholar Guo Moruo (1892–1978) depicted its “golden trumpets crowding the branches.” Their words capture its essence: triumph lies not in fragrance, but in earliness and abundance. Like humble, unnoticed details in the urban landscape, it quietly forms spring's foundational hue.

Beijing has systematically revamped its ring roads, transforming utilitarian corridors into vibrant landscape belts. Winter jasmine, widely planted as part of this renewal, forms continuous “spring flower belts.” From Chaoyangmen to Dongbianmen bridges, several kilometres (km) of golden blooms unfold in early spring, becoming the city's earliest herald of the season.

Following winter jasmine, Yulan magnolias come into bloom. After winter's dormancy, their blossoms enliven bare branches. Pure white petals, faintly celadon, gleam like jade in sunlight, hence the name Yulan (literally “jade orchid”); elderly Beijingers fondly call it Wangchun Shu (“spring herald”). Yulan magnolias captivate not only for their form and hue, but also for their precise timing: unassuming yet arriving just as spring stirs, they adorn the city's skyline in white or purple, lending it a sense of serene clarity.

In Beijing, the most ceremonial display of Yulan magnolias lies along Chang'an Avenue. Nearly 100 magnolia trees line the street from the Grand Hotel Beijing along East Chang'an Avenue to the intersection of West Chang'an Avenue and Fuyou Street. In particular, the green belts on both sides of Xinhua Gate feature more than 40 Yulan magnolia trees. Most of these were planted in the 1970s and now display thick, gnarled branches, forming dense, well-arranged groves. Each late March, the trees are draped in white blossoms that make the blue sky appear purer and clearer. Set against red walls and yellow roof tiles, these blooming trees create a distinctly Beijing-style spring tableau.

Near the National Centre for the Performing Arts, purple Yulan magnolias

take on a distinctive elegance. They appear to converse with the building's fluid architecture, as sleek curves meet tender blossoms and cool tones mingle with warmth. In this interplay of hardness and softness, the scene reveals a quietly modern Beijing aesthetic.

Princess tree blossoms lend Beijing's spring a delicate, romantic charm. Along Hongda Road in the Beijing Economic-Technological Development Area, the stretch known as “Princess Tree Avenue” presents an annual floral spectacle each spring, where kilometres of trees bloom from late March to mid-April. From a distance, the blossoms form a soft lavender haze; up close, gradients of light pink and creamy white cluster like misty clouds. When a breeze stirs, petals shimmer gently, casting a violet veil over the street. Removed from the city's usual rush, time seems to slow here. Cycling or walking through this “tunnel of blossoms,” beneath a floral canopy and shifting dappled light, feels like stepping into a space where the passage of time slows.

Beyond their blossoms, this avenue is also distinguished by its history. Planted over three decades ago, when the Beijing Economic-Technological Development Area first took shape, the modest saplings have since grown into towering trees,

with trunks dozens of centimetres in diameter and branches weaving a verdant canopy. The old phrase “plant princess trees to attract phoenixes” has long been realised, as the zone transformed from barren land into a vibrant hub. Here, the princess trees' blooms mark not only seasonal renewal, but also stand as silent witnesses to urban transformation.

As spring fades and blossoms fall, princess trees do not “retreat”; instead, their dense canopies swiftly unfold, offering welcome summer shade. Flowers and leaves take turns with the seasons, sustaining a quiet rhythm of life along the street.

From golden winter jasmines to white Yulan magnolias and purple princess tree blooms, spring flowers have moved beyond simple displays to become integral to Beijing's urban fabric. From trunk roads to neighbourhood lanes and alleys, floral sequences, winter jasmine, Yulan magnolia, begonia, peach and purple-leaf plum, are arranged by bloom time, extending spring's presence and reshaping city life: once we sought flowers; now flowers await us.

And in this way, the streets of Beijing are being quietly rewritten, no longer mere passages for transit, but living corridors where nature and the city breathe as one.

Horticultural Stations: Gathering with Friends amid Flowers

Beijing's spring dwells not only along streets and waterfronts, but also deep within grey-brick hutongs. Residents create floral havens with greenery and blossoms, turning ordinary days into a four-season “flowery life,” where beauty quietly graces everyday moments.

Tucked among courtyard homes at 43 Dongsi Liutiao, the elegant, two-storey Dongsi Horticultural Station stands out as a rare green oasis deep within Beijing's hutongs. Along its walls, flower beds and potted plants of varied sizes burst into colourful abundance. Even without the signboard, the vibrant display quietly reveals its purpose.

Stepping inside, visitors are instantly enveloped in lush greenery. The ground floor hosts more than 300 floral and foliage varieties thriving on tiered racks, golden pothos, dendrobium, anthuriums, monstera, succulents and moth orchids, transforming the space into a perpetual spring garden. Upstairs, the sunroom and terrace reveal another realm: sunlight pours through the glass roof, bathing every plant in warm light. Pothos and bougainvillea flourish, while monkey tail cacti and nerve plants add a touch of quirky charm. Delicate ornaments and hanging baskets dangle from tall foliage, bringing playful movement to the space. On the walls, traditional Beijing gourds hang quietly, some bearing natural textures, others painted with floral and fauna motifs. From the terrace, vibrant blooms meet endless grey-tiled rooftops, where nature's vitality and hutong warmth blend in gentle harmony.

Daily life at the station is simple and down-to-earth. Wooden tables double as workbenches for flower arranging and seedling care, and as plant clinics where residents bring yellowing or root-rotted pots. Gardeners “on duty” diagnose problems on the spot and share hands-on tips. Neighbours drop by to chat about gardening, bask in sunlight among blossoms, and unwind amid greenery, a quiet haven woven into hutong life.

▼ Yulan magnolia blossoms frame the National Centre for the Performing Arts on a mobile phone screen





▲ Staff members from Dongsì horticultural station guide students in hutong gardening



▲ Vibrant spring flowers at Beixiao River Park



▲ Crabapple Blossom Stream at Dadu City Wall Relics Park

More than a floral “living room” for residents, the horticultural station also serves as a community-rooted green platform. The station’s head, Lu Kun, notes that it hosts 70–80 public events each year, from gardening workshops and hands-on plant care to spring tree planting, pressed-flower crafts, floral design and aromatherapy sessions, all closely connected to everyday life. The station also takes the initiative by bringing horticultural outreach to local institutions and schools, inviting more people to embrace gardening and develop a love for nature.

With the horticultural station at its heart, greenery has spread through hutongs and alleyways, turning residents’ shared love of flowers into collective action. In 2017, amid neighbourhood renewal, several enthusiasts in Dongsì Liutiao founded the Hutong Garden Flower Friends Association. Li Jian, known for his gardening skill and passion, was elected its “flower chief.” He recalled, “We began with just seven people, hoping to improve our doorstep environment through planting.” Within a decade, this small effort expanded to six surrounding communities with more than 700 members. Neighbours contribute funds and labour, building trellises, masonry

flower beds and “micro-gardens” in forgotten corners. Once-cluttered spaces have become “residents’ living rooms,” a quiet, ground-up transformation rooted in shared care.

“Not all that blooms today came easily,” Li Jian reflects. Early on, hutong doorsteps were cluttered with disused coal sheds and decades of accumulated belongings, leaving little room for flowers. To spark change, the association invited grandchildren to join planting activities; children brought home enthusiasm, and grandparents gradually shifted from resistance to participation, clearing spaces and tending blooms together. Today, the group binds neighbours through shared care. Many members are retirees who formed a “forest nurturers” team, maintaining micro-gardens and turning neglected corners into shared living spaces filled with seasonal colour.

Each autumn, Dongsì Liutiao hosts its grandest floral event, the hutong chrysanthemum exhibition. More than 1,000 pots bloom elegantly along the alley, drawing visitors from across the city. Most proudly, members’ meticulously cultivated chrysanthemums have, for years, appeared in Beihai Park’s professional exhibitions and earned places in Chang’an Avenue’s National

Day displays, bringing hutong fragrance to adorn the capital’s foremost thoroughfare.

The horticultural station and the Flower Friends Association flourish side by side, like leaves and blossoms, bringing greenery into hutongs until nearby outdoor plants and flowers become part of everyday life. Across Beijing, such living landscapes are quietly unfolding, turning alleyways into vibrant spaces of ecological practice.

Greenery-lined Clear Waters: A City of Flowers

In April, Beijing is dotted with vibrant blossoms. Waterfront greenways become floral stages: fallen begonia petals at Beijing Dadu City Wall Relics Park drift along streams, forming a flowing blossom creek; flowers line the left bank of the Qinghe River between the Beijing–Tibet Expressway and Heiquan Road. “Spring waters fill the capital,” is more than a line of poetry; it is a living landscape to be visited, seen and experienced.

In recent years, as river restoration and waterfront access have expanded, riversides have been returned to the city and its people. Clear waters, verdant banks, continuous paths and thoughtfully

designed platforms have gradually shaped a network of waterside greenways. The Second Ring Road greenway encircles the ancient city like a jade necklace, weaving nature and history, and linking Longtan Park, Ming Dynasty City Wall Relics Park and dozens of landmarks, including the Temple of Heaven and the Lama Temple. In spring, this route transforms into a walkable tableau of blossoms.

Along the greenway, apricot, plum and wild peach blossoms unfold in succession between water and sky. By the moat along the south-eastern Second Ring Road, plum trees beside the Zuo’anmen Gate turret bloom profusely, framing a tranquil yet vivid spring scene against grey bricks and tiled roofs. Visitors pause to seek the perfect angle where ancient architecture and blossoms share the frame. In Beijing, the pairing of “flowers and old buildings” has become an unspoken aesthetic principle. Distant walls stand silent while nearby blossoms sway gently, history’s weight and spring’s lightness merging in a single, fleeting moment.

Through integrated upgrades, waterways such as the Kunyu River and the South Moat now connect seamlessly with walkways, forming continuous waterside corridors. Along these routes, Yuyuantan

Park’s early-blooming cherry blossoms, Jin Zhongdu Ruins Park’s ornamental peach blossoms and Xuanyang Bridge’s begonias take turns flowering, each site passing the baton of spring and extending its presence across the city.

Among Beijing’s waterfronts, the Liangma River stands out as one of the most transformed. Once the Ming-Qing-era “Horse-Drying River,” it is now reimagined as an international leisure corridor. In spring, blossoms and ripples intertwine along its banks. From Liuli Bridge to Guanlan Bridge, hundreds of cherry trees create a continuous spectacle: Some Yoshino, Yoko, Sekiyama and other varieties bloom in succession from early April to May, their colours shifting under the slanting sun, like a falling-petal scroll of urban spring.

Most striking is the harmony between people and nature. Cherry groves shelter birds; mallards drift among fallen blossoms and swans glide across the water. Visitors pause to admire the scene or sip coffee by the riverside, with flower viewing woven naturally into everyday life.

If the Liangma River embodies refinement and vibrancy, the Bahe River reveals a broader spring spirit. As an ecological corridor linking the city

centre and Beijing sub-centre, it has been restored into a waterfront blooming across three seasons. Forsythias and plums appear in early March, followed by ornamental peaches, then begonias, early cherries and purple-leaf plums in April, and fringe trees in May. From golden yellow to lilac, colours unfold in sequence, keeping spring in motion.

The Beixiao River has emerged as one of Beijing’s new cherry blossom destinations. Along its 4.2-km waterfront corridor, nearly 6,000 trees bloom in succession, creating a rare urban floral retreat. Along the gently winding waterside paths, layered blossoms arch overhead, graceful and soothing. Carefully arranged ground plantings complement the pink-white canopy, forming fresh, ever-changing vistas. Delicate flower boats drift across the water, blossoms adorning their decks and adding a quiet poetry to the scene.

“Greenery-lined clear waters: a city of flowers.” This transformation goes beyond aesthetics, reflecting a new urban philosophy. As waterways revive and shorelines are reshaped, blossoms take root naturally. The city shifts from a space of functional passage into one for pausing, relaxing and experiencing.



Enjoying Gardens with Vibrant Blossoms

Text by Gao Yuan Photos by Tong Tianyi, Jiang Litian, He Rong

One cannot truly appreciate the splendour of spring without strolling through a garden. Beijing is home to an abundance of historical landmarks, most notably its former imperial gardens. With the arrival of spring, the city undergoes a vivid transformation as flowers burst into bloom, weaving a magnificent tapestry of colour. As a result, flower viewing has become a cherished seasonal activity, allowing the public to immerse themselves in the fleeting beauty of nature. The riot of hues found within these gardens reflects a deep human yearning for the natural world. Regardless of the weather, Beijingers never fail to mark the season with their annual celebration of spring blossoms.



Presenting Deep and Light Red Hues

Species: Peach Blossoms
Landmark: Beihai Park

For Beijingers, the peach blossom is the freshest herald of spring. Even when early spring remains chilly, these blossoms emerge in a vibrant display, casting off the city's subdued winter mantle and draping it in brilliant colour, lending an air of delicate elegance to the ancient capital.

Historically, Beijing's peach blossoms flourished in the Western Hills, while Beihai stood out as the finest urban viewing spot. Scholar Deng Yunxiang (1924–1999) vividly recalled a peach grove near Haopujian in Beihai, describing the blossoms as a misty sea of rosy, fragrant snow. Ming Dynasty writer Yuan Hongdao (1568–1610) also noted that even after the Flower God Festival, Beijing's weather often remained bitterly cold. As a result, Beihai's peach

trees were sometimes seen blooming amid lingering frost and late snowfall.

Snow-dusted peach blossoms are now rarely seen in Beihai, yet the splendour of their "rosy cloud" spectacle endures. Deng treasured his personal memories, including a breathtaking peach tree in full bloom at Su Garden, his residence in Xihuangchenggen. This unforgettable scene became his private symbol of Beijing's spring awakening.

In March, Beihai Park is adorned with peach blossoms and the scene known as "Jade Islet in Spring Shade," one of the Eight Sights of Yanjing (today's Beijing). From the Jin (1115–1234) and Yuan (1271–1368) to the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, the area surrounding Jade Islet functioned as an imperial garden. During the Qing Dynasty, Emperor Qianlong (reign: 1735–1796) further expanded and refined the landscape over more than 30 years, creating ever-changing and awe-inspiring vistas.

This stunning vista was recorded as early as the Yuan Dynasty. In his "Ode to the Eight Sights of Yanshan," Chen Li (1252–1335) described entering Beihai's walled gardens as though stepping into an ethereal realm. He praised the tranquil beauty of the islet, observing that although spring in Dadu, present-day Beijing, was fleeting, the blossoms here bloomed with remarkable abundance and lingered far longer.

As spring awakens, the peach trees at the foot of Jade Islet and along the lakeshore in Beihai Park burst into bloom. Layers of pink and white blossoms unfold like rosy clouds, lining the winding stone paths. Though the islet offers a modest range of varieties, it enchants visitors with its ancient temples and timeless charm. At the summit, the White Dagoba rises prominently, its gilded spire reaching into the sky and framed by gracefully scattered peach trees. Together, these blossoms evoke the vitality of spring and the

enduring splendour of the ancient capital.

Since ancient times, peach blossoms have symbolised beauty in Chinese culture. These enchanting early spring blooms, unfolding like a vibrant tapestry, have inspired poets across the centuries. Du Fu (AD 712–770) captured their delicate radiance, while Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907) poet Wu Rong (AD 850–903) evoked a luminous spring landscape through their presence. Tao Yuanming's (AD 365–427) "Peach Blossom Spring" further elevated this admiration into an idealised realm, reflecting a long-held aspiration among the Chinese people for a more harmonious and ideal existence.

Peach blossoms, both enchanting and quietly wise, bloom in harmony with nature's rhythm. Between late spring and early summer, the poet Bai Juyi (AD 772–846) encountered them flourishing on Lushan Mountain in Jiangxi, long after their fragrance had faded elsewhere. Moved by the unexpected sight, he composed the poem "Peach Blossoms in Dalin Temple": "The fourth lunar month in the human world and all the flowery scents fade, / Peach blossoms in the mountain temple just start to bloom. / Often lament the whereabouts of spring when she retires, / No idea she could have wound up at this site."

Two centuries later, Song Dynasty scholar Shen Kuo (1031–1095) criticised Bai's poem as absurd, questioning how newly blooming peach blossoms could appear when all other flowers had faded. However, the following spring, he encountered a similar scene during the cold fourth lunar month in the mountains, where the foothills lay bare while the summit bloomed in vibrant red. Only then did Shen grasp Bai's meaning. He realised that mountainous regions, owing to delayed seasons and distinct environments, could preserve spring's colours long after the plains had faded.

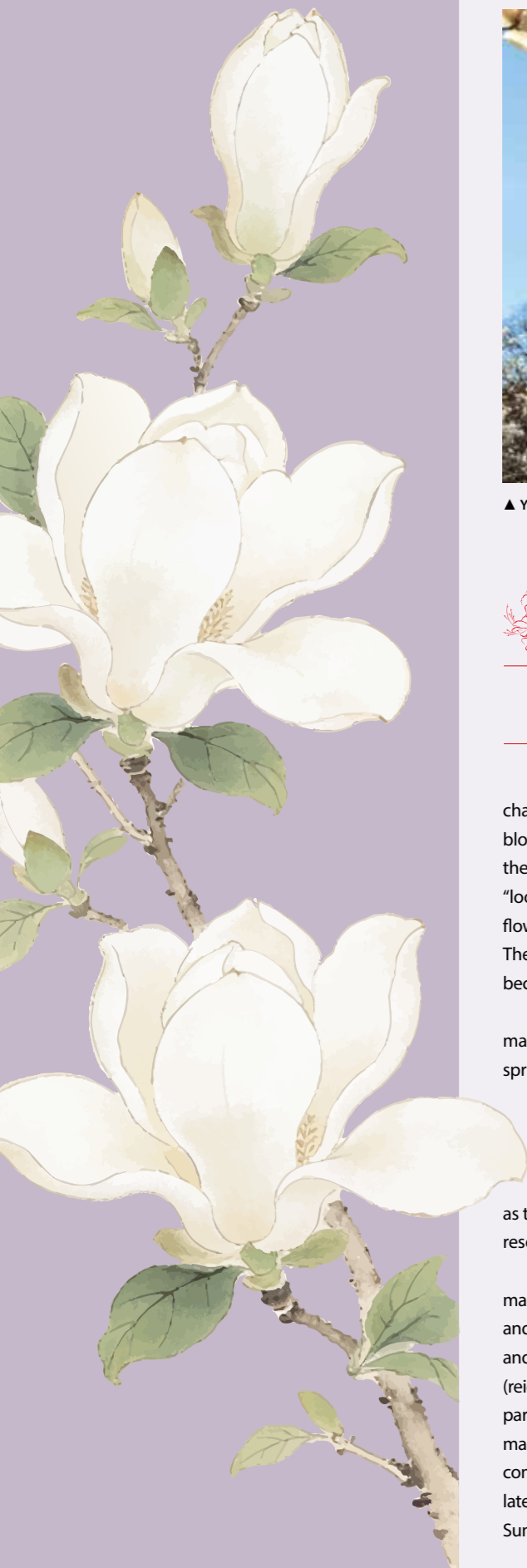
The cycle of peach blossoms blooming and fading offers insight into the fundamental rhythms of nature that govern all things. This quiet realisation perhaps captures the true essence of what it means to appreciate flowers.

▼ Peach blossoms frame the White Dagoba at Beihai Park



Peach blossoms in full bloom at Beihai Park





▲ Yulan Magnolia blossoms outside the Hall of Joyful Longevity in the Summer Palace

Revealing the Jade-Snow-Like Blossoms and their Fragrance

Species: Yulan Magnolias
Landmark: Hall of Joyful Longevity in the Summer Palace

Despite lingering cold, seasonal change still arrives. White Yulan magnolias bloom in March, bringing fragrance to the chilly air. Ancient Chinese called them “looking forward to spring.” Once magnolias flower, spring is considered to have arrived. Their elegant, wine glass-like forms seem to beckon the season.

Beyond their graceful elegance, magnolias blooming in the chilly early spring have long inspired Chinese artists and scholars. Their distinctive charm lies in blossoms that emerge before any leaves, a trait that enhances their appeal. Magnolias are often described as tall, snow-white blooms that open resolutely against the wind, year after year.

Since the Jin and Yuan dynasties, magnolias have been cultivated in Beijing and were especially favoured by the Ming and Qing imperial families. Emperors Kangxi (reign: 1661–1722) and Qianlong held particular affection for them. Kangxi planted magnolias widely in Changchun Garden and composed “Ode to Magnolias.” Qianlong later transplanted southern varieties to the Summer Palace’s Leshou Hall (Hall of Joyful

Longevity), where they became enduring symbols of the ancient capital.

Leshou Hall, where Emperor Qianlong cared for his mother, Empress Dowager Chongqing, was planted with magnolias in honour of her fondness for them. Their fragrance in full bloom earned the area the name “Jade Fragrance Sea.” In 1860, during the reign of Emperor Xianfeng (1850–1861), most were destroyed, leaving only a single white magnolia tree south of Yaoyue Gate.

The courtyard of Leshou Hall features magnolias, crabapples and peonies, symbols of prosperity and wealth, expressed in Chinese as “*yutang fugui*.” “*Yutang*” refers to the Hanlin Academy or the residence of imperial concubines or immortals. As “*yulan*” (magnolia) and “*haitang*” (crabapple) echo this phrase, and peonies symbolise riches, these plants commonly appear in imperial gardens. Their motifs also adorn court paintings and utensils, carrying auspicious meanings.

The elegant scenery of the Summer Palace has long inspired literary admiration. Since modern times, its spring landscapes have appeared frequently in prose. In 1948, Shen Congwen (1902–1988) stayed at Jiqing Pavilion, where he described the courtyard of Leshou Hall as spacious, with buildings that are grand despite their modest height. In spring, magnolias and crabapples bloom vibrantly within this tranquil setting and to its west.



▲ Crabapple blossoms in full bloom at Prince Kung's Mansion

Deng Yunxiang greatly enjoyed visiting the Summer Palace. Among its many attractions, his favourite was the Pavilion of Herald Spring, which he praised for revealing the earliest signs of spring and conveying the season most vividly.

Showing the Most Charming Hues of Spring

Species: Crabapple Blossoms
Landmark: Pavilion of Crabapple Blossoms at Prince Kung's Mansion

Mid-spring marks the peak of crabapple blossoms, filling the ancient capital with colour. From Haitang Huaxi in Yuan Capital Earthen Wall Ruins Park to the fragrant paths before the Forbidden City’s Wenhua Hall, from Zhongshan Park’s blooming avenues to the vibrant Crabapple Garden in the National Botanical Garden, the city is resplendent in bloom.

Among Beijing’s floral spectacles, the crabapple blossoms at Prince Kung’s Mansion are not to be missed. *Xifu Haitang* (midget crabapples) before Chenghuai Xiexiu Hall bloom in late spring, forming clouds of rosy colour. Historically, the mansion’s owner hosted gatherings here, composing poetry and sharing wine

beneath the blossoms, at a spot aptly named the Pavilion of Crabapple Blossoms.

Prince Kung’s Mansion, built in 1780 during Emperor Qianlong’s reign, is Beijing’s best-preserved Qing-era prince’s residence open to the public. It witnessed the dynasty’s rise and decline, from Emperor Qianlong to Emperor Xuantong (reign: 1909–1911). Its history, from the first owner Heshen (1750–1799) to Prince Kung Yixin (1833–1898) and his descendants, is steeped in legend. Scholar Zhou Ruchang (1918–2012) proposed it as the prototype for the Grand View Garden in Cao Xueqin’s *A Dream of Red Mansions*.

Cao Xueqin was an ardent admirer of crabapple blossoms, which appear repeatedly throughout *A Dream of Red Mansions*. Tanchun established a poetry club called the “Crabapple Society” after Baoyu received the blossoms, with themes including poems titled “Crabapple.” Baoyu also used withered white crabapple blossoms to symbolise Qingwen’s illness. From teacups to costumes, crabapple motifs appear throughout the Ning and Rong mansions, appearing almost everywhere.

Liang Shiqiu (1903–1987) cherished crabapple blossoms, praising them in *Notes on Various Blooms*. At his Beijing home, he planted four midget crabapple

trees and tended them carefully. In spring, blossoms covered every branch, offering enjoyment day and night, a quiet pleasure he deeply cherished.

Ming Dynasty horticulturist Wang Xiangjin (1561–1653) recorded four woody crabapple varieties: *Tiegeng Haitang* (flowering quince), *Chuisi Haitang* (Hall crabapple), *Xifu Haitang* (midget crabapple) and *Mugua Haitang* (Chinese quince). Among them, the midget crabapple, tall and slender, was considered the finest, valued for blossoms that shift from crimson buds to soft pink petals, like clouds at dawn.

Midget crabapples bloom throughout Beijing, from the Forbidden City and Summer Palace to Tanzhe Temple and Soong Ching Ling’s (1893–1981) Former Residence. However, the most storied and legendary specimens stand within Prince Kung’s Mansion.

When Aisin Gioro Puru (1896–1963) lived in the mansion, he hosted friends

▼ Crabapple blossoms frame historic architecture at Prince Kung's Mansion



beneath the blossoms for poetry gatherings.

Puru, grandson of Prince Kung Yixin, was a noted painter and calligrapher. Each spring, he invited scholars to admire the mansion's crabapple blossoms and compose poetry. In the 1930s, when Fu Jen Catholic University occupied the estate, its president Chen Yuan (1880–1971) invited Chen Yinke (1890–1969), Lu Xun (1881–1936) and Zhang Boju (1898–1982) to form the Crabapple Blossoms Poetry Society. Revived in 2011 by Zhou Ruchang, the gathering remains a cultural highlight in the capital.

Echoing a Towering Manchurian Catalpa with Ancient Cypress

Species: Manchurian Catalpa

Landmark: Ningshou Palace Garden in the Forbidden City

The ancient *qiu* tree, known as the Manchurian catalpa, beside Guhua Pavilion in the Forbidden City is now in peak bloom, its pale purple blossoms forming graceful, cloud-like clusters.

Often regarded as a “living fossil,” the Manchurian catalpa is an ancient ornamental tree. Old yet vigorous specimens also grace the White Dagoba and Jietai temples. However, the tree before the Forbidden City’s Guhua Pavilion is the oldest and most storied, standing as the most representative specimen, an elegant sentinel that has endured for more than three centuries.

Guhua Pavilion, in the Forbidden City’s Ningshou Palace Garden, is often known as Qianlong Garden. Built by Emperor Qianlong for retirement, this tranquil retreat features winding paths and four connected courtyards, each with distinct views, reflecting the southern landscapes he admired.

Built around the Manchurian catalpa, Guhua Pavilion reflects Emperor Qianlong’s respect for nature. When a minister proposed felling the tree to improve the layout, the emperor instead centred the pavilion around it, shifting structures backward. The preserved ancient tree and architecture now complement one another, forming a celebrated garden scene.

Landscape architect Meng Zhaozhen (1932–2022) praised Emperor Qianlong for preserving the Manchurian catalpa. The tree’s fissured roots symbolised imperial continuity, reaching a fourth generation alongside Qianlong, the dynasty’s fourth ruler. The pavilion thus honoured both the tree and imperial lineage.

Emperor Qianlong’s devotion to the tree went further, as he named the structure “Guhua Pavilion,” meaning “ancient blossoms” of the Manchurian catalpa. To express this sentiment, he inscribed a couplet still displayed today: “The bright moon and clear breeze are endless treasures; the towering Manchurian catalpa and ancient cypress are intimate friends.”

Emperor Qianlong created a lively spring setting around the Manchurian catalpa at Guhua Pavilion. A variety of elements form a harmonious courtyard anticipating the season.

The emperor excelled at creating artistic conceptions. His aesthetic vision continues to fulfill generations’ enduring desire to appreciate the beauty of blossoms.



▲ Manchurian Catalpa blossoms stand out against the ancient buildings of the Forbidden City

Reading among Beijing’s Blooms

April is often considered the most beautiful month and an ideal time for reading. Amidst Beijing’s splendid spring scenery, readers can immerse themselves in books and explore the city’s rich history recorded by writers of the past.



Landscapes and Customs in Yanjing

Author: Deng Yunxiang

Brief Introduction: This classic work carefully chronicles Beijing’s folk customs, organised around landscapes, scenic sites and traditions. Through vivid depictions of seasonal change, clothing, food, housing, transport and markets, it forms a broad cultural tapestry spanning imperial etiquette and everyday life. The author, a contemporary writer, folklorist and Redology scholar, came from a scholarly family and was deeply immersed in the ancient capital, the scenery of Yanjing and the customs of Peiping. Widely regarded as an authority on Beijing anecdotes, his elegant, reflective prose offers a vivid window into the city’s legacy, preserving the spirit of a bygone era.



Peking: A Historical and Intimate Description of its Chief Places of Interest

Author: Juliet Bredon (United Kingdom)

Brief Introduction: This book by Juliet Bredon (1881–1937), who lived in China during the 1920s and 1930s, was praised by Lin Yutang (1895–1976) as “the most comprehensive work about Beijing.” It vividly depicts the city’s history, society and customs during the Republic of China period (1912–1949), capturing the spirits of the era. As a Western classic on Beijing, it remains a respected historical resource for understanding the city’s cultural legacy.

Photo Album of the Imperial City of Old Beijing

Author: Osvald Sirén (Sweden)

Brief Introduction: This work by Sinologist Osvald Sirén (1879–1966) continues his exploration of Beijing following *The Walls and Gates of Peking*. In 1922, Sirén visited Zhongnanhai, then the seat of the Beiyang government (1912–1928), and explored the city’s fortifications. Accompanied by Puyi (1906–1967), the last Qing emperor, he also entered the Forbidden City for on-site investigation and photography. The volume gathers highlights from this journey, including more than 280 photographs. These images provide valuable historical material for scholars studying Beijing’s cultural legacy, capturing the atmosphere of the ancient capital and offering lasting insight.



Round about My Peking Garden

Author: Alicia Little (United Kingdom)

Brief Introduction: Arriving in China in 1887, Alicia Little (1845–1926) lived there for two decades and published nine English works. *Round about My Peking Garden*, her final book, was her only memoir focused on Beijing.

Its Chinese translation has recently drawn renewed curiosity. Online discussions suggest her former residence was a garden in Baishu Hutong, Dongcheng District. Originally owned by Qingkuan (1848–1927), an Imperial Household official, the estate was later divided for foreign tenants, including the author.



Strolling in Serene Temples with Blooms

Text by Zhang Yan
Photos by Zhang Xin, Tong Tianyi, Wu Hui, Jiang Litian

Beijing's springtime allure extends well beyond its thoroughfares, gracing ancient imperial gardens, private courtyards and sacred temples alike. Historically, imperial gardens were closed to the public and quadrangle homes remained strictly private, leaving temples as the natural gathering places for spring outings, particularly around the Flower God Festival in the second lunar month. Locals would come to offer incense, linger among the blossoms and wander the temple grounds, weaving floral appreciation together with Buddhist observance. This harmonious interplay between vibrancy and serenity has long been the defining spirit of the capital's spring tradition.

The floral displays within ancient temples possess a unique charm, their serene and understated charm imparting an extraordinary sense of tranquillity. It is this quality that lifts Beijing's spring beyond mere fleeting beauty, transforming it into a profound encounter with time itself, steeped in the atmosphere of these venerable sanctuaries.



Enduring Appeal of Lilacs

Historically, Beijing's spring bloom gatherings were grand affairs, with Fayuan Temple celebrated for its lilacs, Chongxiao Temple for peonies, Jile Temple for crabapples and Tianning Temple for *shaoyao* (Chinese peonies). These events drew visitors from every stratum of society.

While Chongxiao Temple's peonies now reside in Zhongshan Park and the blooms of Jile and Tianning temples are no longer to be found, Fayuan Temple's lilacs endure. Within its ancient courtyard, visitors witness a transformation from sparse to abundant blossom, culminating in a sea of flowers around Minzhong Pavilion. Song Dynasty (AD 960–1279) scholar Zhang Minshu described the lilac as a "plain guest" in verse, its pale, elegant hue perfectly complementing the serenity of a Buddhist setting. Here, a monk offers tea to pilgrims amid the blooms while students from the Buddhist Academy of China pass by, and gilded Buddhas in the main hall peer through the branches.

Founded in AD 696 as Minzhong Temple, Fayuan Temple has accumulated far more than lilac fame over its long history. Repeated damage and renovation marked its existence, and it received its present name during the reign of Emperor Yongzheng (1722–1735). Each spring, when lilacs burst into colour, monks prepared vegetarian dishes and fragrant tea, inviting scholars and luminaries to admire the blossoms and compose poetry. From the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1735–1796) onwards, the temple's reputation for floral appreciation spread across Beijing, drawing figures such as Ji Xiaolan (1724–1805) and Lin Zexu (1785–1850), along with members of the renowned Xuannan Poetry Society, whose Lilac Poetry Gatherings left a legacy of exquisite verse that still echoes within the courtyard.

The lilac appreciation gatherings at Fayuan Temple ebbed and flowed over the following century. In the spring of 1924, the temple welcomed a celebrated visitor, the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), together with Chinese luminaries including Xu Zhimo (1897–1931), Lin Huiyin (1904–1955) and Liang Sicheng (1901–1972). Tagore, the first Eastern writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, made his tour of China a spectacle. Wu Yong's *History of the Temple of Heaven* records the scene vividly: "Lady Lin Huiyin, as beautiful as a flower, walked arm in arm with the Indian poet, along with slender Xu Zhimo in his robe, forming a traditional Chinese painting 'Three Friends,' pine, bamboo and plum blossoms." Evening descended yet Tagore lingered; Xu Zhimo joined him beneath a lilac tree and the two composed verses until dawn lit the



▲ Lilac blooms at Fayuan Temple

eastern sky. That gathering inaugurated a legend as soft and lingering as the lilac fragrance itself.

Today, the Lilac Poetry Gathering at Fayuan Temple endures. Each year, as the lilacs release their fragrance, visitors arrive from every direction, converging among the blossoms for an elegant spring assembly that feels untouched by time.

Spring Sights with Yulan Magnolia Blossoms

Historically, beyond the four principal bloom-appreciation gatherings, the early spring Yulan magnolias at Dajue and Tanzhe temples were equally indispensable destinations.

Beijing boasts many fine white and purple magnolia blossoms, but Tanzhe Temple is home to the renowned "Erqiao Magnolias," their lower petals purple and their tops white, making them among the city's most celebrated floral treasures.

The two magnolia trees on Pilu Pavilion's east side date back to the

Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). In full bloom, their pink-purple and ivory-white blossoms appear softly tinted by rosy light, captivating visitors from afar.

At the temple, visitors can sip ancient-style magnolia tea scented with petals, taste seasonal magnolia cakes, listen to copper bells chiming in the breeze beneath the eaves and admire the two swaying magnolias, an exquisitely elegant spring indulgence in the soft spring light.

A 300-year-old magnolia in the courtyard of Dajue Temple's Siyi Hall boasts a celebrated legacy. Legend holds that Zen Master Jialing (1671–1726) planted it upon becoming abbot, having previously served at Hangzhou's Li'an Temple. The magnolia he brought from Hangzhou symbolised the continuation of the Dharma lineage. According to *Speeches of Zen Master Foquan'an*, in 1721, Prince

Yinzen funded Dajue Temple's renovation and recommended Jialing as abbot, the temple's first Dharma master.

Around Qingming Festival, the magnolias flourish. Many scholars of the past found inspiration here, composing poems in tribute to their beauty.

In April 1934, as spring spread across Beijing's Western Hills, the essayist Zhu Ziqing (1898–1948) visited Dajue Temple together with the scholar Chen Yinke (1890–1969) and Redology expert Yu Pingbo (1900–1990). The sight of the blooming magnolia stirred Zhu's imagination, prompting him to liken the blossoms to "a soaring pagoda," "a multitude of stars" and "ten thousand luminous candles." Though he modestly described the resulting work as "a playful piece," the poem has since emerged as a landmark of colloquial Chinese verse,

ensuring the ancient magnolia's enduring place in the literary imagination.

The esteemed scholar Ji Xianlin (1911–2009) was a frequent visitor to Dajue Temple, drawn by the magnolia blossoms and the temple's enduring charm. In his 1999 article "Dajue Temple," he wrote: "That magnolia king was in even more spectacular bloom. Adorned with blossoms, its branches and trunk were entirely draped and covered. Only white petals were visible, obscuring any green. The thousands of blooms on the entire tree appeared as one colossal white blossom."

Dajue Temple has long served as a spiritual haven for scholars. Repeatedly recalled and celebrated in their writings, this ancient magnolia has become an enduring symbol of poetic beauty and heartfelt aspiration.

▼ Yulan magnolia blossoms at Tanzhe Temple





A Pine Entangled with Wisterias

Hongluo Temple, or the Temple of Red Snails, is celebrated for a trio of exceptional features: an Imperial Bamboo Grove established by Zen Master Yunshan during the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368); the Male and Female Ginkgos standing before the Great Buddha Hall (the eastern tree female and the western male); and a Pine Entangled with Wisterias, where an old pine and cascading wisteria vines live in rare and harmonious coexistence.

Hongluo Temple was established during the Eastern Jin Dynasty (AD 317–420) under its original name, Daming Temple. During the Zhengtong era (1436–1449) of the Ming Dynasty, Emperor Yingzong bestowed upon it the

name Huguo Zifu Chan Temple, though it has long been colloquially known as Hongluo Temple. The origin of this name lies in local legend. In antiquity, a deep pond surrounded by peculiar rocks sat at the base of Hongluo Mountain, said to be home to two enormous red snails that each night radiated a deep crimson glow, bathing the surrounding mountains, rocks, grass and woodland in brilliant colour, thus lending the temple its enduring name.

To the west of the courtyard before the Hall of Three Saints lies one of the temple's three most celebrated spectacles: the ancient wisteria and pine. The scene centres on a venerable flat-topped pine and two ancient wisteria vines. The flat-topped pine is over 800 years old. Though its main trunk is not particularly tall, it grows with remarkable verticality, its crown spreading horizontally like a vast canopy, unfurling like an enormous umbrella and covering a considerable expanse. Its branches have proliferated into nine main limbs, stretching out in all directions.

Contrary to the common saying that "a vine entwining a pine will surely cause the pine's death," here the wisteria and

pine exist in a state of mutual reliance and reinforcement, together forming a colossal natural umbrella that magnificently illustrates the marvels of nature and the serene harmony of the environment. Each year in early May, the wisteria blossoms reach their peak, their intoxicating fragrance permeating the entire temple complex. Historically, during the transition from spring to summer when the wisteria was in full bloom, the temple's abbot would frequently invite esteemed monks and renowned scholars from neighbouring temples in the capital to convene beneath the tree, admiring the blossoms and engaging in discussions on Buddhist doctrine. Today, each flowering season, the wisteria's profusion of cascading blooms and dancing shadows continues to draw visitors in great numbers.

Buddhist Tunes among Snow-Like Pear Blossoms

The pear blossoms at Zhihua Temple are an essential stop for any flower-viewer in the capital. The ancient Chinese often likened pear blossoms to snow and snow to the delicate white of pear blooms, and within the temple's courtyard the blossoms appear as though fresh layers of snow have settled upon every branch. Celebrated as "the finest pear blossom in the capital," this spectacular sight has become a hallmark of Beijing's springtime splendour.

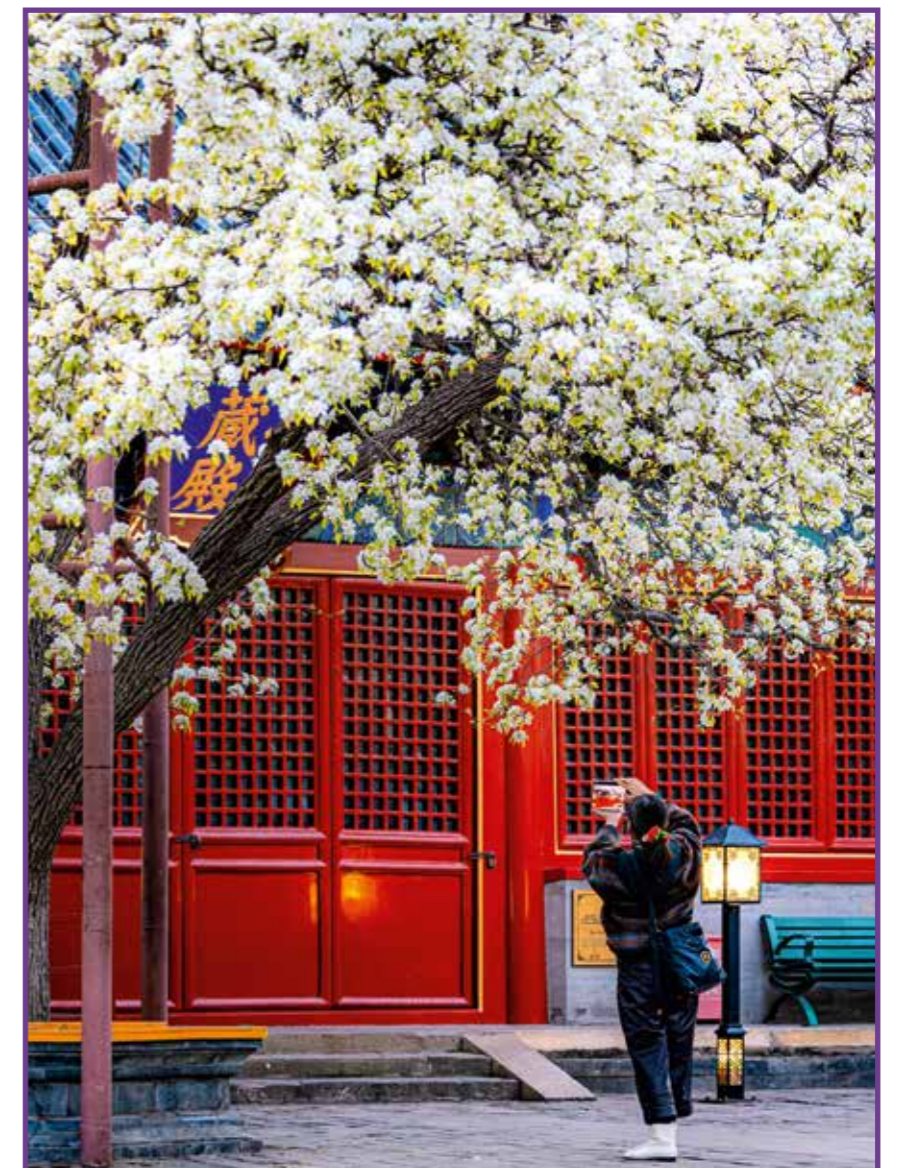
Nestled within Lumicang Hutong, Zhihua Temple is a Ming Dynasty temple celebrated for its sublime spring blossoms. Visitors are first greeted by the delicate fragrance of lilacs drifting through the entrance. Beyond them, ancient pear trees bloom in spectacular fashion, their boughs layered like fresh-fallen snow. In the rear courtyard, magnolias and crabapples intertwine, evoking an air of classical refinement and the auspicious sentiment of "prosperity in the Jade Hall." Amid crimson walls and dark tiles, guests stroll serenely to the accompaniment of birdsong and rustling branches. The temple's two historic pear trees, famed across Beijing, create a

striking contrast of white blooms against red architecture, a vision of tranquil beauty that has captivated visitors for generations. Writer Wang Zengqi (1920–1997) captured their essence in *Plants of the World*, suggesting: "The petals of pear blossoms are made of moonlight." Some say the line was written to his wife, Shi Songqing (1918–1998), herself described as elegant, fair and willow-like, a living embodiment of the pear blossom's quiet grace.

Amidst the cascading pear blossoms, visitors may listen to Zhihua Temple's Jing Music, a China intangible cultural heritage. Originating in the imperial courts, this distinctive genre blends court, Buddhist and folk traditions into a single sound. Its ethereal, lingering melodies retain the elegance of the Tang (AD 618–907) and Song dynasties, and having been preserved without interruption for over five centuries, the tradition is widely hailed as a "living fossil" of ancient Chinese music.

On each open day, musicians perform beneath the temple's ancient pear trees, playing Jing Music on traditional instruments including the *sheng*, *guan*, flutes, gongs and drums. As white petals drift down like snow, the elegant melodies resonate through the surrounding air. Visitors find themselves enveloped in a profound harmony of ancient architecture, blossoms and Buddhist music, immersed in an atmosphere that feels at once enduring and distinctly Chinese.

The lilacs of Fayuan Temple have witnessed poetic gatherings, while the magnolias of Dajue Temple are woven into rich cultural narratives. At Hongluo Temple, wisterias perpetuate a tradition of elegant assembly, and Zhihua Temple's pear blossoms resonate with ancient Jing Music. These temple blooms captivate visitors not only with their beauty but also with the memories they hold. They form a living history, returning reliably each spring. Today, visitors still gather to view blossoms, sip tea, write poems and enjoy music, and these enduring traditions, passed down through generations, ensure that the city's spring remains a season of cherished observance.



▲ Capturing the graceful pear blossoms at Zhihua Temple

Encountering Parks Blanketed with Flowers

Text by Ma Kai
Photos by Zhang Xin, Jiang Litian, He Rong

Spring in northern China moves swiftly. Once the warm breeze arrives, Beijing, the city of 1,000 parks, comes alive. Across parks large and small scattered throughout the metropolis, countless flowers bloom in succession, each taking its turn in the spotlight. There is no need to journey far; one can see spring's splendour unfolding across the entire city. This season's radiance surpasses many other scenes in the world.

Plum Blossoms against Ancient Walls

In early spring, winds still carry the chill, but plum blossoms at Ming Dynasty City Wall Relics Park have bloomed in succession. Against the unassuming old walls, blooming flowers create an amazing springtime spectacle. The park is a popular destination for flower choosing because it has the most plum varieties, growing more than 1,000 plum trees in over 50 varieties. Besides having the common types such as Gongfen, Zhusha, Yudie and Lü'e, it also features some rare varieties, including Dayu, Nanjinghong, Fufen, Huangshanhuangxiang and Shichujin, which are hardly seen in Beijing.

Several plum varieties here captivate visitors with distinctive forms. The Tiaozhi plum, hailed as the “two-faced beauty,” naturally bears dual-hued blooms on a single tree: pink-blossom branches amid white flowers, bicoloured twigs or petals blending both hues—a quiet marvel of nature. In the “Plum Garden Splendour” zone, the Longyou plum grows, with its gnarled branches twisting like a dancing dragon. White, layered petals release a crisp, lingering fragrance. This rare specimen, unmatched in Beijing’s open-ground cultivation, embodies both artistic

▼ Plum blossoms grace a gate tower at the Ming Dynasty City Wall Relics Park

grace and immense horticultural value.

The Meiren plum always takes the grand finale spot in the Ming Dynasty City Wall Relics Park’s plum blossom season. Cultivated from a 19th-century French gardener’s inspiration, this floral “hybrid beauty” features gracefully cascading branches reminiscent of weeping willows. In bloom, pale purplish-red clusters adorn the twigs, with the petals’ shade turning from soft to deep in layered elegance.

Though a delicate southern flower by nature, this plum has taken root in Beijing, defying the ancient adage that “plums do not cross the Yellow River.” Preferring the Yangtze River basin’s cool dampness, it seemed ill-suited to Beijing’s harsh northern winters. Yet through a century of persistent trials and one horticulturist’s lifelong devotion, the city enabled it to cross the river and flourish.

In the early 20th century, gardeners at Zhongshan Park transplanted a few southern plum trees, sheltering them in greenhouses each winter. In the 1950s, horticulturist Chen Junyu (1917–2012)

of the Beijing Forestry College proposed the “southern plums northward” idea: to collect seeds from Hunan Province and Nanjing, sow them across Beijing’s soil, and let them endure decades of bitter cold until the first seedlings bloomed in the early 1960s. For years thereafter, Chen and his students planted plums across Beijing’s parks and beyond, even introducing them to the harsher climates of Northeast China and Northwest China. Today, over 1,000 plum trees flourish in the North Garden of the China National Botanical Garden. They stand beside a stone inscribed with Chen’s handwritten characters “*mei yuan*,” meaning “Plum Garden”—a lasting tribute to the “plum devotee,” whose lifelong dream took root on northern soil.

In Beijing, plum blossoms play many roles. They are woven into the cherished memories and stories of Beijingers.

Elderly Beijingers often recite “nine gates for the Inner City, seven for the Outer City, four for the Imperial City.” This refers to Beijing’s nine Inner City gates, seven Outer City gates and four

Imperial City gates. Among the Inner City’s western gates were Xizhimen and Fuchengmen. Facing the Western Hills, Fuchengmen Gate marked the start of the ancient western road; during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, coal mined from the hills entered the city primarily through this gate, earning it the folk name “Coal Gate.” Because “plum” (“梅” in Chinese) and “coal” (“煤”) share the same pronunciation, coal merchants carved a plum blossom onto the gate archway for good fortune. The carving is known as the “Fucheng Plum Blossom,” celebrated in folklore as “the singular wonder among the nine gates.”

Sadly, Fuchengmen’s gate and gatehouse have long disappeared; today, the “Fucheng Plum Blossom” legend survives only in historical texts and the elderly people’s recollections. Swedish scholar Osvald Sirén, the first foreigner to systematically document Beijing’s fortifications, studied the city’s gates in the 1920s and published the architectural classic *The Walls and Gates of Peking* in 1924. The work is based on field surveys and meticulous observation, yet his account of Fuchengmen Gate makes no mention of a plum blossom carving within the gate archway.

In 1934, American sinologist Lewis Charles Arlington offered a clue in his book *In Search of Old Peking*, noting that “on the south side of the inner gate passage, about six feet (1.8 metres) high, one could see bricks carved with flowers.” Though vaguely worded, this stands as one of the earliest known written references to the “Fucheng Plum Blossom.”

Accounts of the “Fucheng Plum Blossom” vary. Chinese scholar Bai Hequn (1945–2020) recalled a delicately carved white marble plum blossom embedded in the left wall of the barbican gate passage—exquisitely crafted and hailed as a singular wonder among Beijing’s gates. In contrast, Wang Jiliang, a first-generation Chinese aerospace engineer who grew up near



▲ Visitors enjoy plum blossoms at the Ming Dynasty City Wall Relics Park

White Pagoda Temple, remembered seeing the blossom carved on a brick within the main gate passage—on the south side, about two metres (m) above ground. He described a five-petal flower, roughly 12 centimetres wide, sunken in fine intaglio relief. Notably, it was placed in the main gate archway, not the barbican, highlighting the elusive nature of this lost urban legend.

In truth, the exact appearance or location of the carving no longer matters; the “Fucheng Plum Blossom” endures, etched not in stone but in the memories of elderly Beijingers.

Old Beijing had many plum admirers, including the Peking Opera maestro Mei Lanfang (1894–1961), whose name itself means “plum fragrance.” In the spring of 1922, while climbing Fragrant Hills with friends, he playfully inscribed a nearly two-m-tall “梅” character on a bluestone at Hama Peak. That spontaneous act unexpectedly sparked a charity performance: philanthropist Xiong Xiling (1870–1937), fundraising for the Fragrant Hills Orphanage, jokingly “fined” Mei for “defacing a scenic spot” and requested a benefit show. Mei obliged, performing the play *Yuzhoufeng* (literally, *The Universe’s*

Edge) on an open-air stage at Jingyi Garden to thunderous applause. He donated the entire 11,000 silver coins in proceeds to the orphanage. The stone carving thus became a quiet testament to an artist’s compassion for humanity.

Summer in Old Beijing was incomplete without plum-based sour plum soup. Chinese journalist Xu Lingxiao (1886–1961) noted in *Hundred Tales of the Old Capital*: “In summer, iced plum soup prevailed.” Scholar Liang

▼ Plum blossom bonsai





Central Radio and TV Tower rising in the west. South Hill Viewing Area offers elevated panoramas; sunken Cherry Blossom Valley invites contemplation. For solitude, the northwest's Cherry Blossom Lake area remains a hidden sanctuary.

Since the inaugural Cherry Blossom Viewing Festival in 1989, Yuyuantan Park's cherry blossom celebration has grown into northern China's largest cherry-themed cultural event. Each spring, the park is adorned with over 3,000 sq.m of floral displays and artistic installations, including immersive walk-through landscapes. By day, visitors stroll amid the blossoms; as evening falls and lights glow softly, the night-blooming cherries take on an even more tender, dreamlike radiance.

Boating offers Yuyuantan's signature perspective. Drifting on the lake, visitors float amid blossoms without crowding on shores. Water reflections blend floral hues with tower silhouettes and shadows of willows—a living watercolour.

Contrary to popular belief, cherries are not Japanese imports. Japan's *Sakura Taikan* traces their origin to the Himalayas, later flourishing across China's Yangtze River basin and

▲ Cherry blossoms line the lakeside at Yuyuantan Park

Shiqiu (1903–1987) added that Beijing's version stood out for its rock sugar and fragrant touches of rose, osmanthus and sweet olive. He especially praised Xin Yuan Zhai's infusion as being "rich" with sugar, thick plum essence, and little water, yielding a deep, robust flavour. Chilled to perfection, with balanced sweet-sour, it lingers on the tongue like fine wine, too delicious to swallow. One senses Liang savoured it not for thirst, but for pure delight.

Plum blossoms join orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum as the "Four Gentlemen," and they are grouped with pine and bamboo as the "Three Friends of Winter." Their crystalline purity and resilience against frost and snow embody a Chinese aesthetic etched in the soul. Plum appreciation follows the principle "valuing sparseness over abundance, age over youth." What captivates is not merely the flower but the slanting branches and gnarled trunks. Beijing's plums, which journeyed a long distance, endured bitter winds

and frost, yet took root and flourished. In spring, the city gains elegance and poetry from these blossoms; in return, the plums acquire depth and tenderness from this ancient capital.

Cherry Blossoms at Yuyuantan Park

Following the plum blossoms, cherry blossoms unfurl in delicate pink hues. In late March, early-blooming varieties at Beijing's Yuyuantan Park blossom pink and white, heralding the city's most celebrated spring ritual.

No discussion of Beijing's cherry viewing is complete without mentioning Yuyuantan Park. Though not the first to welcome blossoms, it is the capital's liveliest floral stage. Since 1973, when the first Sargent Cherry trees took root by the lake, over 40 varieties and nearly 3,000 cherry trees have now bloomed in succession. More than scenery, they embody a cherished annual promise.

Each variety carries distinct grace

and origin. Hangzhou Early Cherry, a native Chinese species, blooms first; it is therefore dubbed the "harbinger of spring." Its slender petals form clusters like tiny lanterns, inspiring the park's "Early Cherry Blossom Announcing Spring," one of the famed "Eight Cherry Scenes."

Sargent Cherry stands as the venerable elder of Yuyuantan Park's cherry collection. Following the normalisation of China-Japan relations in 1972, Japan gifted 1,000 Sargent Cherry trees to China; over 100 were planted along the lake's northern shore the following year, forming the park's first cherry grove. These transplanted trees began their new life at the park with careful tending. Today, a few surviving specimens can still be found in Oriole Cherry Garden. With their large, richly hued blossoms and stately bearing, they carry a palpable sense of history—silent witnesses to the park's evolution from a single grove into its current "one garden, two embankments, three zones" layout. By mid-to-late April, late bloomers deliver

the finale: Kanzan, Fugenzo, Shogetsu and Ukon. Kanzan, the "noble princess," flaunts layered petals like a royal gown. Fugenzo bears two curved green pistils resembling elephant tusks—a touch of Buddhist serenity. Shogetsu ("Pine Moon") blends pinkish-white flowers with tender leaves in quiet elegance. Ukon, the rare "colour-changing cherry," shifts from green to yellow to soft pink in a mesmerising spectacle.

Staggered blooming stretches the fleeting floral week into a month-long celebration. This year, fragrant newcomers like Xiangfei and the whimsically named Luosifen cherry defy the myth of scentless blossoms. The park's own Mingguihong and twice-blooming Jiangzhang cherry add fresh delight.

Viewing routes unfold with intention. The 250,000-square-metre (sq.m) Cherry Blossom Garden anchors the experience. Spots like Cherry and Begonia Spring Dawn and Oriole and Crimson Cherry Clouds weave flowers, pavilions and water into a classical harmony. At the spot

By the Water, a solitary, spreading tree leans over the lake, creating a beloved scene for photographers. The Thousand-Metre Cherry Embankment frames the blossoms against clear waters, with the

▼ A cherry blossom-themed decorative display at Yuyuantan Park





▲ Peonies at Jingshan Park

southwest. China remains the global diversity hub: among about 40 wild cherry species in the world, 33 are native here. The term “cherry blossom” first appears in the Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907) poet Li Shangyin’s (AD 813–858) verse: “Where lutes and flutes lament, cherry blossoms droop over willow-lined lanes.” During the Tang Dynasty’s golden age, cherries were exported east to Japan, along with architecture, tea and the arts, seeding what later became “Japanese romanticism.”

Beijing’s cherry story is brief yet profound. Harsh winters and dry heat defy cherry preferences. In 1973, horticulturists planted the Sargent Cherry trees lakeside, amended the soil and nurtured them with care in Yuyuantan Park. Decades of selective breeding and acclimatisation forged a resilient northern lineage. Each bloom honours generations of dedication.

“To miss Yuyuantan is to miss Beijing’s spring.” For countless Beijing residents, this pilgrimage is an unspoken yearly vow. In the recurring blush of petals, the city finds poetry; in the steadfast trees, Beijing offers its own quiet promise—renewed, remembered and deeply loved.

Graceful Peonies at Jingshan Park

After the Grain Rain solar term in the lunar calendar, Beijing’s breeze grows unmistakably warm, and the peonies of Jingshan Park bloom with grace and confidence. Clusters upon clusters blossom beside vermilion walls and ancient cypresses, exuding a vibe of elegance.

North of the main path on the park’s front hillside lies the most vibrant floral corridor, where peonies

sprawl down the slope like brocade draped over earth. Before Guande Hall stand venerable specimens and rare cultivars—flowers with perfect form and dignified presence, best appreciated at a leisurely pace. To the west, the Science Garden captivates people with its comprehensive collection: clear labels accompany each variety, turning the stroll into an open-air classroom for flower lovers.

Visitors flock to the park from every direction, drawn by this annual gathering with peonies, which are beloved for their “national beauty and heavenly fragrance.” Cameras click incessantly before lavish blooms, capturing spring’s fleeting splendour. The Yaohuang variety, universally hailed as the “King of Peonies,” glows with honey-wax hues and a crown-like form: full, upright and regal. Weizi, acclaimed as the “Queen of Peonies,” complements

Yaohuang in stately harmony; her deep purplish-red petals form numerous layers, sometimes amounting to 100 per blossom, embodying the most substantial presence among Jingshan’s peonies. Zhaofen blushes with tender pink, reminiscent of a maiden’s cheek—it was once called “Child’s Face” for its youthful softness—and enchants visitors with its rich fragrance. Doulü, a rare pale green variety, carries a cool, refined aura; its subtle charm deepens upon closer inspection. Beyond these “Four Famous Cultivars” flourish Luoyanghong, Erqiao, Lümuinyinü, Pomozi and others, each with distinct character. Low hedges gently separate visitors from the delicate flowers, ensuring the latter’s protection.

People cherish peonies not only for their radiant splendour but also for their unyielding spirit. Among them, the “Charred-Bone Peony” carries a legend tied to Empress Wu Zetian (reign: AD 690–705). It is said that during a winter garden feast in Chang’an (today’s Xi’an), the empress commanded all flowers to bloom overnight. Only the peony refused this unnatural decree, angering the sovereign. In fury, she banished the peonies to Luoyang and ordered them burnt. Though their stems turned black as charcoal, the flowers remained defiant. When spring winds returned, they sprouted anew, blooming more fiercely and brilliantly than before. Thus the name “Charred-Bone Peony” was born, a testament to resilience.

Peonies have graced Beijing for over a millennium. *The History of Liao* records Emperor Shengzong’s (reign: AD 982–1031) visit to Changchun Palace in Tongzhou to admire peonies. In 1179, Emperor Shizong (reign: 1161–1189) of the Jin Dynasty (1115–1234) excavated Xihua Pond (today’s Beihai Lake), piling the earth into a small mound—the earliest form of Jingshan Hill—where peonies and other plants were first cultivated. During the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), Jingshan served as the imperial rear garden; *Yuan Palace Reminiscences* notes “over 100 peony seedlings were planted all around, reaching five feet in height”—already a courtly spectacle. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, as an imperial garden, Jingshan saw peonies planted annually; viewing them in the solar term Grain Rain became an imperial custom. Opened to the public in 1928, the park undertook major peony introductions from Heze, Shandong Province, in 1957, later adding renowned varieties from central and northwestern China, as well as Japanese and Western cultivars. Today, over 500 varieties and 20,000 peony plants thrive here, spanning nine colour series and 10 floral forms.

To elderly Beijingers, peonies have long been

“prosperity flowers,” bearing auspicious meanings of wealth, thriving households and vibrant life. Traditional courtyards often grew peonies alongside Yulan magnolias and begonia, their homophonic names forming the blessing “yutang fugui” (“Jade Hall, Wealth and Honour”). Affluent families practised viewing out-of-season peonies during the Spring Festival, praying for a year of joy, celebration and enduring prosperity.

The literati and painters have always favoured peonies. Among Jingshan’s brilliant array, black peonies—deep purplish-red and unique in character—hold special allure. The cultivar Qinglongwomochi was reportedly the Chinese scholar Guo Moruo’s (1892–1978) favourite. Artists Qi Baishi (1864–1957) and Wang Xuetao (1903–1982) visited the park several times to sketch; their painted peonies glow with vibrant yet refined elegance, their brushwork steady and profound, mirroring the very spirit of Jingshan’s blossoms.

Winding gently up Jingshan Hill’s southern slope, peonies accompany every step. Layer upon layer of petals unfold leisurely in the warm sun, their delicate fragrance drifting in the air, soothing heart and mind. Atop Wanchun Pavilion, one sees the Beijing Central Axis in the distance and blooming peonies below. With a floral scent embracing visitors and the capital’s grandeur within view, a spring pilgrimage to admire peonies feels complete.





Exploring the Countryside with Breathtaking Scenery

Text by Zhang Jian Photos by Wu Hui, Ling Fuping

In the days around Qingming Festival, or Tomb Sweeping Day, spring blossoms gradually unfurl across the city before Beijing's vernal charm quietly extends into the broader countryside. A drive of an hour or two in any direction reveals landscapes that open into breathtaking vistas: the vast expanse of pear blossoms in Panggezhuang Village in Daxing District, cascading along snow-laden branches; Pinggu District's sea of peach blossoms rolling like rosy clouds; the Yulan magnolia and wild peach blossoms at Changping District's Yinshan Pagoda Forest, framing ancient pagodas in poetic harmony; apricot blossoms in Fangshan District's Puwa draping highland terraces like mist; and in the Juyongguan valley, trains gliding through floral tunnels as the mountains unfurl into a flowing ribbon of colour.

These blossoms ripple across undulating mountainsides, dot the spaces among farmhouses and complement ancient ruins, rendering springtime in Beijing not merely a feast for the eyes but a landscape rich with stories waiting to be explored.



▲ Visitors enjoy the blooming Wanmu Pear Orchard

An Expanse of Pear Blossoms, Snow-laden Branches

Heading south from central Beijing, exiting the Daqing–Guangzhou Expressway after Panggezhuang Bridge and continuing westward, a vast sea of white blossoms comes into view through the car window, a sure sign that one is approaching Beijing’s premier pear blossom destination, Wanmu Pear Orchard.

Wanmu Pear Orchard lies in Panggezhuang Town in Daxing District, centred on Lihua Village with pear trees stretching across Hanjiapu, Zhaocun, Qiancaogezhuang, Beicaogezhuang and other villages. Spanning over 10,000 *mu* (666.67 hectares), the orchard is home to Beijing’s largest, oldest, most diverse and earliest-blooming cluster of pear trees. From April, blossoms burst along every branch and the orchard transforms into a sea of white flowers.

The pear blossom viewing area extends across a radius of approximately three kilometres (km), with a flower-viewing path winding through the blooming sea. Visitors stroll, cycle or ride electric carts along the route. Some pause beneath the flowering boughs to raise

their smartphones or cameras, capturing memories among the blossoms.

Wanmu Pear Orchard is home to more than 30,000 century-old pear trees. Many have wide canopies laden with blossoms, their branches stretching from one tree to the next as if without end. The fragrance of pear blossoms is not strong, but when the entire orchard blooms at once, a gentle sweetness quietly fills the air, drawing visitors deeper into its charm.

The observation tower at the centre of the orchard offers the finest vantage point for taking in the blossoms. At 22 metres (m) tall, it rewards those who climb to the top with a sweeping view of the entire sea of flowers below, endless white pear blossoms rolling away like an ocean.

At the heart of the orchard lies Lihua Village, originally named Nanzhuang Village. Renamed in 1981 in honour of its famed Jinbahuang (literally, “golden handle yellow”) pears, the village boasts a celebrated “star tree”: a gnarled, 400-year-old tribute pear tree. According to legend, the tree was planted during the Wanli era (1573–1620) of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), its fruit later selected as imperial tribute.

Every April, Panggezhuang hosts its annual Pear Blossom Festival. Since its

inaugural edition in 1994, the festival has grown into one of Beijing’s—and indeed the nation’s—most renowned spring flower-viewing celebrations. It offers not only blossom viewing but a variety of engaging experiences, allowing visitors to enjoy added delights alongside the floral spectacle.

During the Pear Blossom Festival, multiple markets are set up throughout the orchard, offering speciality produce and handicrafts.

Suggestions for Viewing Flowers

Flower: Pear blossoms
Golden Flower-viewing Period:
Early April to mid-April



A Sea of Peach Blossoms Waving Like Rosy Clouds

Around early April each year, as Panggezhuang’s Wanmu Pear Orchard comes alive with blooming pear trees, Beijing’s Pinggu District also reaches its most picturesque moment. More than 200,000 *mu* (1,333.33 ha) of peach blossoms burst into bloom, covering the hills and fields in a

sea of pink and red, like drifting clouds and brocade.

Driving along mountain roads into northern Pinggu, visitors are soon enchanted by peach blossoms lining both sides of the road. Cycling or hiking through the orchards immerses visitors in Pinggu’s famed sea of peach blossoms. A classic viewing route begins at Guan Zhuang Intersection and heads north towards Dahuashan Town. After passing through Yukou Town, visitors arrive at the renowned Baili Peach Blossom Corridor.

Xiaoyuzi Village, southwest of Dahuashan Town, is one of the most renowned spots along the corridor for viewing peach blossoms. More than 30,000 *mu* (2,000 ha) of peach orchards are nestled within a basin surrounded by mountains. In the 1980s, these orchards expanded into a continuous sea of blossoms so vast that they were recorded in Guinness World Records. From a hillside vantage point, pink floral clouds blanket the entire valley in layered waves stretching towards the horizon. Some say the most beautiful moment with peach blossoms comes when standing beneath a flowering tree and looking up.

For a panoramic view of the peach blossom sea, visitors can climb Xiaojin Mountain, a solitary peak rising from the blooming orchards in Beigong Village of Dahuashan Town. From the viewing platform at the summit, the vast floral expanse unfolds beneath them.

Pinggu’s peach blossoms are also a delight for drivers and travellers en route.

Zhenluoying Town marks the final chapter of Pinggu’s peach blossom season. Visitors who miss earlier blooms can still enjoy flowers here in late April. As Pinggu’s northernmost mountainous town, Zhenluoying sits at higher elevations, where more than 10 peaks rise above 1,000 m, surrounded by rugged cliffs and encircling ridges. The cooler climate delays blossoming,

creating a late-spring sanctuary. Strolling beside mountain streams, past elegant peaks and villages shaded by greenery, with peach blossoms stretching along the paths, visitors soon realise that the dreamlike peach blossom realm celebrated by ancient poets unfolds right here.

Beyond peach blossoms, Zhenluoying is also known for its Pear Blossom Avenue, a roughly 10-km route linking Guanshang Village, Xisiyu Village, Dongsiyu Village and Hetaowa Village. Each April, swathes of pear trees burst into bloom, while purple Chinese violet cress carpets the ground beneath.

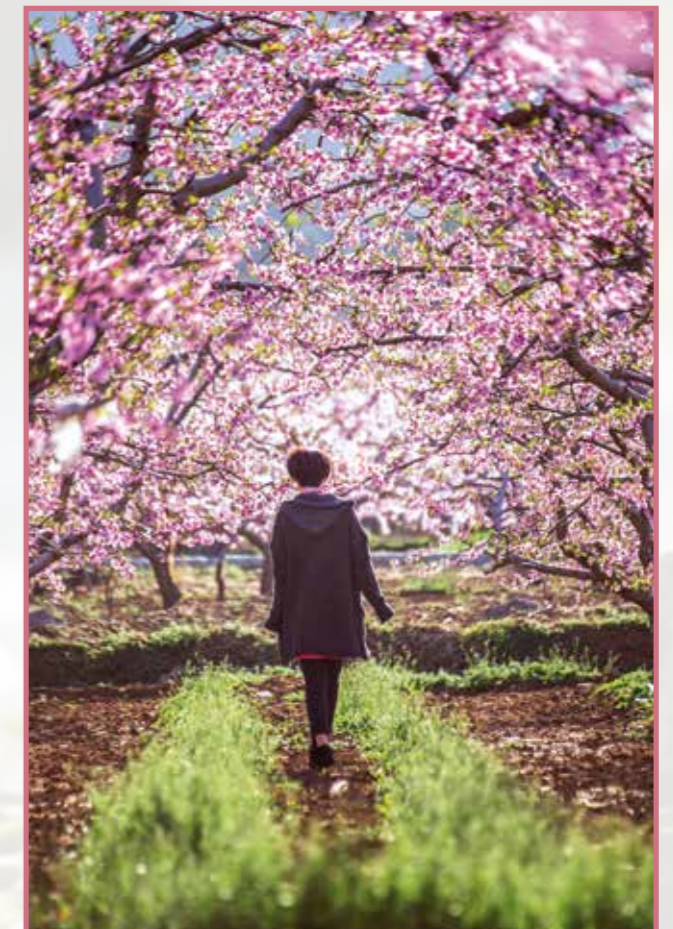
When Pinggu’s peach blossoms bloom, the renowned Pinggu Peach Blossom Festival also arrives. During the festival, visitors not only admire delicate blossoms and immerse themselves in sweeping floral seas, but also take part in a diverse range of activities.

Suggestions for Viewing Flowers

Flower: Peach blossoms
Golden Flower-viewing Period: April 10 to April 28 (due to variations in terrain and elevation, the blossoms unfurl successively across different zones)



▼ A sea of peach blossoms in Pinggu





▲ Apricot blossoms blanket the mountainsides

Terraces of Apricot Blossoms, an Idyllic Picture

For those who find peach blossoms commonplace, following China National Highway G108 westward from Tianningsi Bridge on Beijing's West Second Ring Road offers a different prospect entirely. After a two-hour drive, the road winds upward, mountains rise steeply, and the view beyond the window opens suddenly into a vast, unfamiliar landscape: Puwa Township, the south-westernmost tip of Beijing's Fangshan District.

Often called Beijing's "Little Tibet," Puwa Township sits at high elevation amid encircling mountains, its ridges undulating and its valleys deep. The G108 highway winds dramatically between cliffs and ravines, threading past terraced fields that ripple like waves across the slopes. Each April, apricot blossoms descend upon the hillsides in soft clouds, their delicate pink-white hues spilling over mountaintops and weaving among villages and roads, forming a seamless, naturally painted scroll of rural spring.

The G108 highway through Fangshan District offers more than 10 viewing platforms where travellers can pause

to take in the breathtaking scenery at leisure. Dongcun Huatai Scenic Area, the most celebrated vantage point in Puwa Township, stands on a high-altitude plateau connected by the highway's "10,000-m aerial corridor." Ascending the Huatai ridge costs nothing and rewards visitors with stunning vistas, particularly along the 1,600-m ridge trail, where a leisurely stroll through the spring breeze reveals terraced fields and winding roads cascading in endless curves from mid-slope to valley, offering picturesque delight at every turn.

Though terraced fields in northern China lack the gentle grace of their southern counterparts, they possess a distinctive beauty all their own. Walking through Dongcun Village brings these fields into intimate view, with undulating terraces of sinuous contour, a small river threading through the valley basin, villages clinging to the mountainsides, green peaks encircling the landscape and farmers quietly tending their plots. Together, they compose a serene tableau of pastoral life.

Not far east of Dongcun Huatai Scenic Area lies a ridge known as Shenshuling (literally, "Divine Tree Ridge"). At its peak grows an ancient maple tree said by locals to possess a kind of spirit: before strong

winds or thunderstorms arrive, its leaves rustle with unusual clarity.

The township's high elevation means that light snow occasionally falls in April, settling gently on blooming apricot branches, petals and snowflakes coexisting in delicate harmony, as though spring and winter had agreed, briefly, to bloom together.

Suggestions for Viewing Flowers

Flowers: Apricot blossoms, wild peach blossoms, azaleas

Golden Flower-viewing Period: Early April to mid-April (some regions until late April)



Blooming Mountainous Flowers Swaying in the Breeze

Just a two-hour drive north of urban Beijing lies a hidden "train to spring." Each April, when wild peach blossoms, cherry blossoms and white apricot flowers burst into bloom across the hillsides flanking the tracks, the landscape transforms into the most romantic journey in Beijing's suburbs, one made possible by the Suburban Railway Line S2.

Departing from Huangtudian Station

in Changping, the S2 line heads north towards Yanqing District, winding past Juyong Pass, Shuiguan Pass and the Badaling section of the Great Wall. As the train threads slowly through a sea of blossoms, the hillsides on both sides erupt in colour, wild peach, cherry and white apricot flowers adorning the winding Great Wall and majestic mountains alike. The most enchanting moment comes near Juyong Pass, where the terrain narrows into a classic "two mountains embracing a valley" formation. The railway cuts through the gorge, its slopes blanketed in apricot and peach blossoms, pink and white clusters cascading down the hillsides while the Great Wall traces the distant ridgeline. For those seated in the last carriage, a curve in the track brings the entire train into view, winding through the floral expanse like a silver ribbon gently unfurled across the valley.

For those wishing to step more fully into the floral sea, however, a quiet blossom-viewing boardwalk awaits on the opposite side of the valley.

Built along the mountainside, the Juyong Pass Blossom Boardwalk stretches over 2,000 m, its wooden path winding through the forest and dotted with viewing platforms and small pavilions. Following the natural contours of the terrain, it forms two small loops and one large, offering visitors ever-changing perspectives of the spring floral sea.

Stepping onto the boardwalk and looking up, one finds countless blossoms blanketing the slopes in a pink-and-white floral sea that spreads layer upon layer into the distance. Beyond, the Great Wall's ramparts trace the ridgeline, its majestic grandeur in quiet dialogue with the delicate beauty of the blossoms below.

From the viewing platform, the vista unfolds in full as a

Hexie train emerges from the tunnel and glides slowly along the tracks through the blossom sea. Its silver-grey carriages sweep past pink-and-white blooms while flowering branches sway gently in the breeze, as though the entire valley were bidding it farewell. Raising a camera captures a scene of almost composed perfection: the Great Wall, a train, blossoms and valley intertwined in a single frame.

No visit to Juyong Pass would be complete without exploring the historical relics within its fortress area. Ranked alongside Shanhai Pass and Jiayu Pass as one of the Great Wall's three great passes, Juyong Pass's fortress spans a 15-km-long valley flanked by layered peaks and lush forests. As far back as the Jin Dynasty, its scenery was celebrated as one of the "Eight Great Sights of Yanping" under the name "Lush Greenery of Juyong Pass." Within the pass stand ancient structures including the Cloud Platform, silent sentinels in the valley that have watched over the blossom sea for centuries.

Suggestions for Viewing Flowers

Flowers: Apricot, cherry, wild peach blossoms Golden Flower-viewing Period: From late March to mid-April (this year, until April 21)



Spring colours the countryside for just over a dozen days, yet leaves an indelible impression on the heart. The city's outskirts remain, spring after spring, among the most cherished destinations for visitors.

▼ A train passes through a sea of blooms along Suburban Railway Line S2



Sharing Eastern Floral Fragrances with the World

Text by Ma Kai Photos by Tong Tianyi



▲ Raymond Evison (centre) being interviewed

Inside the greenhouse of Beijing Floralscape Co., Ltd., 82-year-old Raymond Evison bent down to touch blooming clematis. With neatly combed white hair and a gentle wit, the British

nurseryman exudes remarkable vitality, despite hands shaped by decades of working with soil. The founder of a clematis nursery on the island of Guernsey in the United Kingdom first

established ties with China 45 years ago. Recently, he guided his Beijing team in cultivating the world's first commercially fragrant large-flowered clematis, the Tianxiang series, enabling China's "Queen of the Vine" to spread its rich aroma across the globe.

Evison's passion for clematis began in his teenage years. He entered horticulture at the age of 15 and has devoted more than 60 years to cultivating superior varieties. His Guernsey nursery has become a world-leading breeding centre, producing three million seedlings each year. He has developed over a hundred renowned cultivars, including Josephine, Filigree and Crystal Fountain, and has earned multiple gold medals at the Chelsea Flower Show.

"This was never merely employment, but a lifelong vocation," Evison said with a smile. He believes fine clematis should combine elegant form, rich hues, a compact habit, repeat flowering and longevity, qualities that allow ordinary consumers to succeed. "When displayed, it should declare confidently: 'Choose me. I'm beautiful.'"

His passion for breeding forged an unbreakable bond with China. He first visited in 1981, travelling through Hong Kong, Guangzhou and western Sichuan, hiking through mountains to observe native flora. Scenes of villagers wheeling pigs and carrying chickens to market remain vivid in his memory. Yet China's germplasm resources impressed him most: of roughly 300 wild clematis species worldwide, China is home to more than half. Since the 18th century, key genetic resources for European horticultural breeding have originated here.

"Gardens throughout Britain, Europe

and North America would be far less vibrant without the contributions of Chinese flora," Evison said with genuine conviction. His formal association with China began at an international horticultural science conference in Hamburg, Germany, in 1982, where he met Professor Long Yayi, a leading authority on China's perennial flowers. The two specialists connected instantly, forming a strong transnational friendship. Evison later hosted Professor Long on Guernsey, introducing him to nurseries and gardens operating under the auspices of the Royal Horticultural Society. This pivotal relationship marked the beginning of Sino-British collaboration in horticulture.

Through Professor Long's introduction, Evison partnered with Beijing Floralscape Co., Ltd. during the 2019 Beijing International Horticultural Exhibition. Together, they established a dedicated clematis garden, marking the beginning of a long-term breeding collaboration. "Shared vision and mutual trust drive this cooperation," Evison noted. He praised the young, perceptive and capable Beijing team, offering his 60 years of expertise to jointly refine and develop new varieties with Chinese partners.

The joint aim is to breed clematis that shrug off both cold and heat, while remaining compact and richly perfumed. Given the limited space

▼ Raymond Evison



▼ A clematis greenhouse



in many Chinese urban flats, new varieties must be suitable for cultivation on balconies or in flowerpots. By incorporating genes from Chinese species, these plants will withstand northern frosts and southern heat.

Breeding demands patience. In Europe, it typically takes 10 years from cross to retail. With Beijing Floralscape, seeds were sown in 2020, yet commercial hybrids reached the market in just six years, a record that still astonishes Evison as the swiftest triumph of his career.

At the 2026 Beijing Spring Flower Exhibition, the Tianxiang (Eastern Fragrance) series made its debut, filling a notable gap in the market. Its vibrant, large-flowered vines climbed the central arch, while one purple bloom with yellow stamens was named in honour of Professor Long Yayi. "A milestone in Sino-British horticultural cooperation," remarked Evison, his eyes gleaming. "We've given clematis both beauty and scent."

Speaking on his collaboration with Beijing's youthful team, Evison is full of praise. He eagerly shares his lifelong expertise, while their fresh ideas continually invigorate his thinking. "They learn rapidly, pose incisive questions and we jointly explore solutions. This intellectual synergy is profoundly rewarding." He smiles, noting that such a partnership rejuvenates him and fuels his enthusiasm immensely.

Over 45 years of association with China, Evison has witnessed remarkable transformation. Rustic landscapes have given way to modern motorways lined with floral displays, while horticultural facilities, from advanced greenhouses to research laboratories, now rank among the world's finest. With admiration, he observed, "China has not only caught up with international standards but has now surged ahead to set the pace." Evison believes China will play an increasingly influential role in global horticulture. "The world can expect China to contribute even more exquisite plants," he added.

Evison continues his dedicated work, planning a special exhibition at the Chelsea Flower Show to highlight the contributions of Chinese flora to global horticulture and encourage appreciation of Eastern plants. For Chinese gardening enthusiasts, he offers practical advice: clematis is highly adaptable and thrives even in pots, with vines climbing windowsills to brighten everyday living spaces.

"My greatest fulfilment comes from travelling the world and seeing the flowers I have cultivated bring joy to people," Evison said. He reaffirmed his commitment to work with Chinese partners to breed superior varieties. His aspiration is for clematis, known for its toughness and abundant blooms, to gain an even stronger presence in gardens worldwide.

A Floral Tribute to the Nation

Text by Ma Kai Photos courtesy of Beijing Floralscape Co., Ltd and by Tong Tianyi



Li Haibo, one of the organisers of the 2026 Beijing Spring Flower Exhibition, moved between booths, overseeing layouts and ensuring standards were met. When he encountered a striking bloom or floral artwork, he would pause to offer an explanation. Li described each plant's origin, growth habit, colour, form, uses, breeding background and cultural significance, reflecting his deep passion for floral art. Since joining Beijing Floralscape Co., Ltd. in 1992, he has been closely involved in flower cultivation and floral arrangement.

Li smiled when asked what first drew him to the trade, admitting it was largely accidental. As a youth, he loved painting and, at his teacher's suggestion, entered horticulture. After graduating, he worked in a nursery and volunteered at several floriculture studios. His artistic foundation blended naturally with flower arranging, which requires line, composition and a unified vision. This fascinated him, and through growing understanding and diligence, he progressed from technician to professional florist.

With more than 30 years of dedicated service, Li's career is truly distinguished. He serves as standing director of the China Flower Association, standing director of the China Flower Arrangement Association and secretary general of the Beijing Flower Association. He is also recognised at the provincial level as an inheritor of the intangible cultural heritage of classical flower arrangement and honoured as a master of Chinese floral art. His work has earned numerous accolades, including gold medals at two sessions of the China International Garden Flower Expo, gold medals at four editions of the Hong Kong Flower Show and the Grand Prize at the China Flower Expo, all testifying to his professional excellence.

Each transition from summer to autumn marks Li's busiest season. Since 2009, he has been closely involved in the design and installation of the central floralscape adorning Tian'anmen Square for National Day. Over the years, he has watched the display develop from initial sketches to the finished masterpiece. In the golden light of autumn, when the eagerly awaited floralscape unfolds across the square, few realise that its solemn grandeur is the result of Li's team's painstaking work and unwavering dedication, refined day after day.

"The annual National Day floralscape is a relentless race against time," Li confessed. Designs are often finalised late, leaving limited time for construction under intense public scrutiny. Crews must also contend with unexpected challenges such as adverse weather. A 1:20 scale model is first created, then scanned using 3D positioning to map the coordinates of each bloom. During full-scale assembly, multi-angle inspections ensure perfection from every perspective, and even a single misaligned flower is adjusted overnight.

To guarantee the flower baskets withstand both public scrutiny and the passage of time, Li and his team devote considerable effort to selecting materials, structural supports and simulation techniques. Inside each arrangement, a stainless-steel load-bearing frame provides wind resistance and stability. The petals are made from fire-retardant, light-blocking laminated fabric that retains colour and shape during prolonged outdoor exposure. Small and medium-sized blooms are produced using polyurethane moulds for fine texture and realistic appearance. Special elements, such as *Iris tectorum* and fruit or vegetable motifs, are crafted from fibreglass-reinforced plastic and steel-plate moulds, with every detail carefully refined to achieve maximum visual impact.

Li has also participated in a series of high-profile national occasions. He contributed three-dimensional floral installations for the Beijing 2008 Summer Olympics, created flower displays for the 2014 APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting and designed the flower baskets commemorating the 70th anniversary of the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea. He also oversaw the landscape design for the centenary celebration of the Communist Party of China and the floralscapes that adorned Tian'anmen Square for the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War. On each assignment, he delivered meticulously executed results, adding dignity, colour and splendour to the nation's grand ceremonies through the dedicated work of his team.

Li maintains that Chinese and Western floral arts differ not in hierarchy but in cultural context. Western styles emphasise colour and form, while Chinese floral art



▲ Li Haibo



▲ Floral arrangements by Li Haibo

prioritises line, artistic conception, cultural resonance and the harmony between nature and illusion, imbuing this millennia-old tradition with enduring appeal.

"Mastery of floral art demands more than botanical knowledge; it also requires an understanding of philosophy, painting, calligraphy and even music," Li explained. He often advises younger practitioners that a thorough knowledge of a plant's growth habits should come before technical experimentation or creative expression. At the same time, he encourages them to remain rooted in traditional aesthetics while learning from advanced international techniques and contemporary design concepts.

Preparations are now under way for the 2026 National Day floralscape at Tian'anmen Square. Li explained that each National Day basket serves not only as a heartfelt tribute to the nation's anniversary but also as a showcase of evolving craftsmanship and artistic innovation. Looking ahead, he said with quiet resolve, "Floral art is my vocation. I will continue exploring it and help bring Chinese floral artistry to a wider world."

An 'Eternal Archive' for Millennium-Old Trees

Text by Gao Yuan Photos by Tong Tianyi



▲ Wang Yongge

Adjacent to the bustling Siyuan Interchange and separated by a wall from the familiar "Blue Box" facade of IKEA, a pocket of low woodland flourishes quietly within a compound.

This compound forms part of the Beijing Academy of Forestry and Landscape Architecture and serves as its designated experimental woodland. It also bears a more distinguished and official title: the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Gene Preservation Resource Farm for Ancient and Famous Trees.

The trees currently cultivated here are still young specimens, ranging from 20 to 30 centimetres to 2 to 3 metres in height.

However, their lineage is extraordinary. They are cloned descendants of venerable trees, including the 3,500-year-old "Jiulou Shibacha" in Miyun District, the 1,300-year-old "Emperor Tree" at Tanzhe Temple and the 1,200-year-old Chinese scholar tree in Beihai Park. Through plant cloning technology, Beijing's most ancient and storied trees are being carefully regenerated, continuing their legacy through an alternative form of existence. This initiative is spearheaded by a team headed by Wang Yongge, principal expert at the Ancient Tree Research Institute.

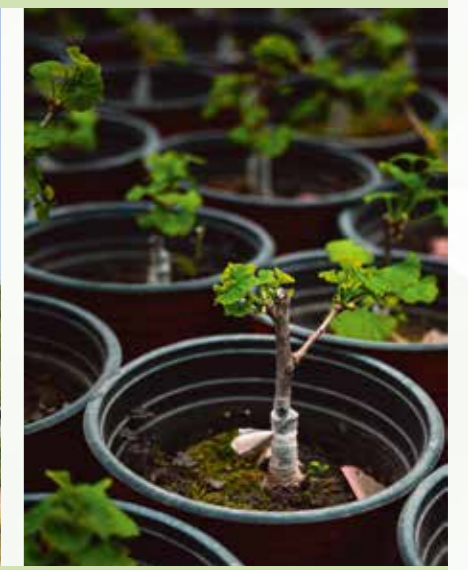
Beijing is home to 41,865 ancient trees, which hold significant historical,

cultural, ecological and scientific value. Cloned replacements offer a means of preserving this heritage should the original trees perish.

Wang and her team meticulously study ancient trees, striving to extend their lifespans and preserve their genetic material. Since 2009, they have explored propagation techniques, surveying Beijing's streets, parks, temples and surrounding countryside. By collecting samples from the tree canopies, they conduct intricate laboratory experiments to produce genetically identical cloned seedlings, ensuring that the heritage of these venerable specimens endures.



▲ "Jiulou Shibacha," a more than 3,500-year-old *Platycladus orientalis* in Miyun District



▲ Cloned seedlings from ancient trees

Wang explained that, to ensure the trees' invaluable genetic heritage endures, the collected samples are propagated using three distinct techniques: grafting, cuttage and tissue culture.

Each ancient tree is unique, meaning no single method proves universally effective. Regeneration therefore becomes a complex process. The team has found that grafting outperforms cuttage for Chinese scholar trees and ginkgoes, while willow and poplar respond more successfully to cuttage. Younger specimens root more easily, prompting the additional use of tissue culture.

Tissue culture involves extracting a tiny bud, leaf or stem fragment from an ancient tree and placing it in a laboratory-prepared nutrient medium. Under carefully regulated conditions, the tissue develops into a complete plant, a process commonly known as plant cloning.

In the academy's tissue-culture laboratory, orderly metal shelves line the room, each holding dozens of tiny glass jars filled with a translucent jelly medium. Within them, cloned seedlings sprout vibrant green shoots, ready to be transferred to soil within a matter of months.

Wang explained that, in theory, any plant tissue can be cultured, but each species and growth stage requires

a distinct nutrient formula, identified through extensive trials, data logging and careful analysis.

Branches from ancient trees are indispensable, yet their collection follows strict protocols. Healthy specimens may be pruned carefully, but for weakened or endangered trees, researchers must wait patiently for a safe and suitable moment.

Since its inauguration in 2016, the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Ancient Trees Protection Research Centre has preserved genetic material and produced over 5,000 seedlings from 148 parent trees across 31 species, 27 genera and 21 families: 80 from Beijing, 50 from Hebei and five from Tianjin. The centre now houses China's largest ancient tree gene bank.

Spanning roughly 2,000 square metres, the gene resource farm is organised into three sections: one for ancient conifers, one for slow-growing deciduous broad-leaved trees and a third for fast-growing deciduous broad-leaved species. Seedlings propagated from historic specimens are planted within these zones. Typically, no more than five clones of any single ancient tree are cultivated, arranged in rows of varying heights. Each sapling carries an "ID card" recording the planting date and details of its parent tree. These parent trees include renowned specimens such as

the "King of Wingceltis" in Changping, the Yulan Magnolia at Dajue Temple and the "General in White Robe" in Beihai Park. The farm also hosts several of Beijing's 10 most admired ancient trees selected in 2018, including the Emperor Tree at Tanzhe Temple and the Nine Dragon Cypress at the Temple of Heaven.

Among the collection, the Jiulou Shibacha in Xinchengzi, Miyun District, stands out as Beijing's "King of *Platycladus orientalis*." Estimated to be 3,500 years old, its trunk is so massive that 9 adults must join hands to encircle it, while its canopy extends across 18 principal branches. Only one young clone currently grows on the farm. After a gale snapped a small branch five years ago, scientists propagated the fragment and planted the seedling in early 2021. It now thrives, having reached a robust size with vivid green needles.

Beijing prides itself on being a green city rich in ancient trees, which resemble living history books chronicling the capital's cultural heritage. Wang and her team have established a permanent archive to preserve the genetic legacy of these trees at their historic sites. The project provides Beijing with an invaluable ecological inheritance, supporting urban greening and strengthening the city's sustainable development future.

Culture Express



人工智能戏剧《躺平 2.0》

2026年4月29日-5月5日人工智能戏剧《躺平 2.0》在鼓楼西剧场演出。《躺平 2.0》剧本是王翀和 ChatGPT 一起编写，音乐由 Suno AI 生成，海报用 Midjourney 设计。与 2024 年首演时不同，2026 年的大多数人，已经见证过 AI 的指数级迭代，承认了 AI 的强大能力。尤其是最近视频生成模型的突破，让大众的兴奋点集中在“AI 能完美模仿人类”的技术层面。每场仅限 24 名观众，你会像“病人”一样被工作人员用移动床推进烟雾缭绕的剧场，躺在床上，仰望天花板上的幕布。你不再是旁观者，而是演出的一部分。你的反应、你的回答，直接决定了这场戏的走向和内容。

The AI Creative Drama *Lying Flat 2.0*

From April 29 to May 5, 2026, the Drum Tower West Theatre will stage the AI-driven drama *Lying Flat 2.0*. This innovative production, co-authored by Wang Chong and ChatGPT, features a score composed by Suno AI and visual designs generated via Midjourney. Unlike its 2024 debut, this new iteration arrives as society confronts the rapid, exponential evolution of AI, particularly its emerging ability to mirror human behaviour. Strictly limited to 24 audience members, the experience is distinctly immersive. Like “patients,” viewers are wheeled into the haze-filled auditorium on moving beds. Lying back and gazing at ceiling-mounted screens, they cease to be mere observers, instead becoming part of the staging. Their immediate reactions and responses directly shape the narrative’s trajectory.



舞剧《五星出东方》

2026年5月16-17日天桥艺术中心大剧场演出舞剧《五星出东方》。该剧以我国新疆地区尼雅遗址出土的汉代织锦护臂为起点，讲述了一段汉民族与西域各民族之间肝胆相照、生死与共的动人故事。

《五星出东方》不仅通过个性鲜明、风格迥异的舞蹈设计将心怀民族大义的汉朝将领奉与豁达健朗的民族兄弟描摹得入木三分，更是运用颇具西域风格的舞蹈语汇刻画出灵动清新的精绝国首领之女春君。她与奉在精绝古城相遇相知相爱，她的舞蹈是大漠古城中最明丽的色彩，她是奉、建特与精绝国百姓之间的情感纽带。

The Dance Drama *Five Stars Rise in the East*

The dance drama *Five Stars Rise in the East* will be staged from May 16 to 17, 2026, at the Beijing Tianqiao Performing Arts Centre’s Grand Theatre. Inspired by a Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) armband discovered at the Niya ruins, the production traces a moving story of friendship and shared destiny between the Han people and ethnic groups of the Western Regions.

Through vivid choreography, the production elegantly portrays Feng, a Han Dynasty general committed to fostering harmony among diverse ethnic groups. Drawing on movement styles inspired by the Western Regions, the performance also brings to life the intelligent and spirited Chunjun, daughter of the Jingjue ruler. Following their fated meeting in Jingjue, Chunjun and Feng develop a deep and growing romance. Chunjun’s presence becomes a vibrant force within the desert city, serving as an emotional bond linking Feng, Jiante and the people of Jingjue.

