

# The 'Okame' Cherry

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## **This early-flowering hybrid is reliably hardy to Zone 5**

Of the many cultivated varieties of flowering cherry growing at the Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsylvania, the most popular with staff and visitors alike is *Prunus ×incam* 'Okame'. Its bright fuchsia-pink flowers (Horticultural Colour Chart 627/2) are among the earliest spring blossoms to appear. They never fail to attract attention. In Philadelphia, the blossoms open as early as March 28th and as late as April 13th, depending on the weather. Even before the blossoms open, the deep maroon flower buds are showy, while the red calyx and stamens persist for a week after the petals drop. Thus, spring color lasts for up to three weeks.

'Okame' cherry has a small, upright crown maturing at 25 feet. Its small stature and fine leaf texture make it particularly adaptable to small gardens. In the autumn its foliage becomes bright shades of orange and yellow.

'Okame' was produced in England early this century by Captain Collingwood Ingram, a famed cherry collector and hybridizer. Ingram had been impressed with the deep rose flowers of *Prunus campanulata* but was frustrated by its lack of winter hardiness. Using *P. campanulata* as the pollen parent, he crossed it with *P. incisa*, a species noted for its profusion of flowers and cold hardiness. 'Okame' was selected as a superior seedling from this cross. In 1952, it received the Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society.

Dr. Henry Skinner obtained scion wood from Captain Ingram and brought it to the Morris Ar-

boretum in 1946. Though distributed to other botanical institutions, 'Okame' remains rare in the nursery trade. Conard Pyle Nursery and J. Frank Schmidt Nursery are large wholesale companies that have recently begun to produce it. In addition, Weston Nurseries in Hopkinton, Massachusetts, is growing 'Okame', and Wayside Gardens will offer it to mail-order customers beginning in the spring of 1985.

Research has shown that 'Okame' cherry roots easily from softwood cuttings and is well adapted to both field and container production. At the Morris Arboretum, six-inch cuttings are taken from mid- to late June. These are treated with Hormoroot A (1,000 parts per million of indolebutyric acid and Thiram), and 95 percent of the cuttings are well rooted within four weeks. Terminal cuttings yield plants with the best upright form; lateral cuttings require pruning to form a strong leader.

As a young plant, 'Okame' cherry grows rapidly and often begins flowering immediately. It is fully hardy in Philadelphia, and the expanding flower buds withstand late spring frosts. It thrives at the Arnold Arboretum, and a specimen observed in Cincinnati for the past six years has been unaffected by the winters. Thus far, 'Okame' cherry has been reliably hardy to Zone 5.

In 1981 'Okame' received the Preliminary Commendation of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and is now being evaluated for the J. Franklin Styer Award for Exceptional Garden Merit.

### Sources

Bean, W. J. *Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles*, eighth edition. Four volumes. London: John Murray, 1976. (The 'Okame' cherry is described in Volume 3, page 376.)

Fletcher, H. R. Award of Garden Merit—LXXXVII. *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society*, Vol.

79, No. 3, pages 127–133 (1954). ('Okame' is discussed on pages 130 and 131.)

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