

## THE SAKURA OBSESSION

The Incredible Story of the Plant Hunter Who Saved Japan's Cherry Blossoms  
by [Naoko Abe](#)

## KIRKUS REVIEW

The story of the connection that linked one man, one flower, and two countries.

Lovers of the outdoors, especially gardeners, will find much to enjoy in Japanese journalist Abe's first English-language book, which won the Nihon Essayist Club Award in 2016. The author engagingly chronicles the travels and plant-collecting adventures of Collingwood Ingram (1880-1981). The Englishman, born to wealth in Victorian times, spent his sickly youth wandering the countryside, where he developed a passion for birds. In 1902, he traveled to Japan to see the birds there, which were similar to England's, and was swept up by the beauty of the country; the young man vowed to return. After World War I, he gradually lost interest in ornithology but began an obsession with horticulture, spurred by his family's move to Kent in 1919. On the property, he found two magnificent flowering Japanese cherry trees, leading him to a long life of discovering, preserving, breeding, grafting, and sharing rare varieties. Interspersed throughout the book are pieces of Japan's history over the last 2,000 years, and Abe provides sufficient detail to edify but never to bore. The author clearly shows the national importance of the cherry tree and how its perception changed with Westernization. Abe's statement that Japan is and was the world's most artistic nation is exemplified by the 250 varieties of cherry tree developed during that era. In the 1920s, as Japan nationalized and modernized, the importance of reviving failing cherry trees was forgotten; there was no money, urgency, or political will to save them. Thanks to the enterprising work of Ingram, however, "they bloomed around the world, in arboretums and parks, along city streets and riverbanks and in millions of suburban gardens." Indeed, writes the author, "Ingram had helped to change the face of spring."

This charming book shows how indebted the world is to Ingram for his work in creating "a shared treasure—the cherry blossom—for all to enjoy."

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