

Cercis canadensis (Eastern Redbud) Pea Family (Fabaceae)

Introduction:

Eastern redbud is an attractive specimen, and is especially nice in naturalized settings. It offers attractive, rosy pink flowers in spring, pretty foliage in summer, and a graceful, multitrunk growth habit.

Culture:

Eastern redbud grows well in a number of soil types except those that are consistently wet. It prefers deep, moist soils that are well-drained. The tree will tolerate both alkaline and acidic soils and full sun or light shade. It performs better in full sun in the north and light shade in the south. It is hardy in Zones 4 to 9.

Eastern redbud is susceptible to *Botryosphaeria* canker that can cause death of many stems. *Verticillium* wilt and leaf spots also affect redbud. Insects that cause problems include tree hoppers, leafhoppers, caterpillars and scales.

Cultivars:

Eastern redbud is a very variable species, partly because it has such a wide geographical range. Not only are there numerous cultivars of redbud, but there are several botanical varieties that are distinctive.

‘Alba’ - Plants sold under this cultivar name may be vegetatively propagated, but usually they are white seedlings (technically a botanical variety - *var. alba*). Flowers are pure white and provide clouds of white flowers in the early spring.

‘Covey’ - A unique weeping form of eastern redbud.

‘Forest Pansy’ - Rounded form, 20 feet tall and 25 feet wide. Has reddish branches that are horizontally tiered, and pink flowers before leafout in spring. Heart-shaped leaves are a brilliant scarlet-purple, then mature to maroon.

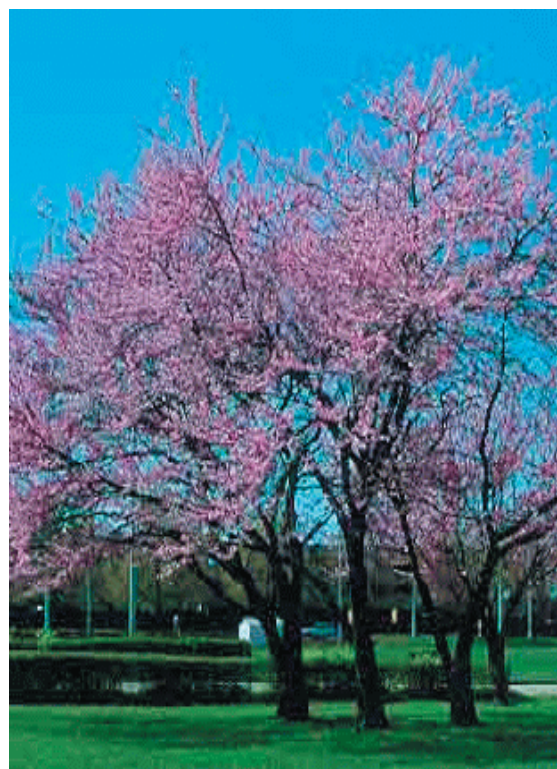
‘Silver Cloud’ - A variegated leaf form. New leaves are spotted with white markings. Partial shade prevents leaf burning. Introduced by Theodore Klein from Kentucky.

‘Flame’ - A double-flowering pink form.

‘Pinkbud’ - Has bright pink flowers.

‘Rubye Atkinson’ - Smaller flowers than the species, but a clear pink.

‘Tennessee Pink’ - Rounded form, with clear pink flowers.



Botanical Characteristics:

Native habitat: New Jersey to northern Florida, and west to Texas, Missouri and northern Mexico.

Growth habit: Trunk tends to divide close to the ground; spreading, flat to rounded crown with ascending branches.

Tree size: 20 to 30 feet tall with a 25- to 35-foot spread.

Flower and fruit: Flowers are reddish purple in bud, becoming rosy pink to purplish when open. The tree flowers for two to three weeks in March or April. Fruit is a 2- to 3-inch-long brown pod.

Leaf: Alternate, simple leaves are 3 to 5 inches across and broadly heart-shaped. Leaves are a reddish purple when they open, changing to a dark green in summer. Fall color ranges from an excellent to a poor yellow.

Hardiness: Winter hardy to USDA Zone 4.

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Botanical varieties:

C. canadensis var. *alba* - Plants sold under this cultivar name may be vegetatively propagated, but usually they are white seedlings (technically a botanical variety - var. *alba*). Flowers are pure white and provide clouds of white flowers in the early spring.

C. canadensis var. *mexicana* - Has shiny leaves with wavy margins. Leaves range in size from 1 to 6 inches in diameter. Flower color is much like that of the species. Thought to be hardy in Zones 6 to 9.

C. canadensis var. *texensis* - Found in Texas, Oklahoma and Mexico, this variety is considered adaptable in Zones 6 to 9. Includes 'Oklahoma' and 'Texas White,' both with shiny green leaves. 'Oklahoma' has rosy magenta flowers; 'Texas White' has white flowers. These trees usually reach a height of 15 to 25 feet with a similar width. They are adaptable in Zones 6 to 9.

Additional information:

Eastern redbud starts flowering when it is 4 to 6 years old. The flowers bloom in early spring before leafout. Flowers are often found on the trunk.

The bark of eastern redbud is brownish black and scaly. On older trees, the orangish inner bark can often be seen. Bark becomes fissured as the tree ages.

Folk healers used the bark of eastern redbud to treat diarrhea and leukemia. Native Americans used the wood of a similar species, *C. occidentalis*, the western redbud, to make bows.

Redbud has been called the Judas tree because Judas Iscariot, after betraying Christ, was said to have hanged himself on *Cercis siliquastrum*, a close relative of eastern redbud that grows in Europe and western Asia. The blooms of the tree, originally white, were said to have turned pink with shame or blood.

In Mexico, the flowers of redbud are fried and eaten. John Lawson wrote of redbud flowers being used in salads in his *History of North Carolina*, published in 1708. Redbud is the state tree of Oklahoma.

Flowers are pea-like in shape



Leaf in autumn color



Fruit is a pod