

EASTERN REDBUD

Cercis canadensis L.

plant symbol = CECA4

Contributed By: USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center



© William S. Justice
@ PLANTS

Alternate names

Redbud, Judas tree

Uses

Ethnobotanic: The Alabama, Cherokee, Delaware, Kiowa, and Oklahoma were among the Native American tribes that used eastern redbud for various purposes. The bark was made into a tea to treat whooping cough. Taking cold infusions of the roots and inner bark treated fevers and congestion. An infusion of the bark was used to treat vomiting and fever. During winters, the plants were used for firewood. Because it is one of the first plants to flower in the spring, the blossoming branches were brought into the homes to “drive winter out.” Children were “fond of eating the blossoms” of eastern redbud.

Wildlife/Livestock: Many birds, including bobwhite quails, eat the seeds. White-tailed deer are among the animals that browse the foliage. Honeybees visit the blossoms. Livestock will browse on Eastern redbud.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant’s current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Description

General: Legume Family (Fabaceae). Eastern redbud is a native, perennial, deciduous tree or shrub. The plants may vary in form from dense and round (to 6 m tall) when grown in sun, to an open, taller form (to 12 m tall) when grown in the shade. The trees produce hundreds of small pink pea flowers in the very early spring, even before other trees have leafed out. The bright magenta-pink to lilac flowers, appear in small clusters, primarily on older stems. The flowers are irregular, 9 to 12 cm long, with ten stamens. The unique, broadly heart-shaped leaves are nearly circular (5 to 10 cm), with a long, slender petiole. The leaves are alternate and have 5 to 9 prominent veins that radiate palmately from the base. New leaves are a light green that darken with age and finally turn yellow in the fall. The seeds are contained in a flat, thin pod (4 to 10 cm long), which turns from green to brown.

Distribution: Eastern redbud is native to the eastern and south-central United States, southward to Texas. For current distribution, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Habitat: Eastern redbud occurs in the forest understory in moist rich woods, along the banks of streams, in ravines, on bluffs, in open rocky woods, and abandoned farmlands.

Establishment

Eastern redbud is widely cultivated as an ornamental because of the plants showy springtime flowers and beautiful heart-shaped leaves. The plants are graceful with arching branches that look lovely as a specimen tree, in groupings, and in shrub borders. The plants do well in soils of moderate to low fertility and are very drought resistant. The seeds have very hard seed coats that require both chilling and scarification for germination, unless planted in the fall. Cuttings are difficult to root. Mature plants do not transplant well so buy young plants that are balled-and-burlapped or container grown. Transplant the plants in the spring or fall, in well-drained soils in sun to part shade. Water the plants regularly until established.

Management

These plants require very little maintenance. The brown seedpods, which can cling to the branches until late in the year, can be somewhat unattractive.

Pests and Potential Problems

Eastern redbud has relatively few pests. Stem canker, leaf spots, and verticillium wilt may be a problem. The plants may experience some insect damage from leaf rollers, treehoppers, scales, leafhoppers, aphids, and spider mites, but damage is rarely severe.

Cultivars, Improved and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

These plant materials are readily available from commercial sources.

References

Bailey, L.H. & E.Z. Bailey 1976. *Hortus Third: A concise dictionary of plants cultivated in the United States and Canada*. Simon and Schuster Macmillan Co., New York, New York. 1290 pp.

Dirr, M.A. 1997. *Dirr's hardy trees and shrubs: an illustrated encyclopedia*. Timber Press, Portland, Oregon. 493 pp.

Dirr, M.A. 1998. *Manual of woody landscape plants. Fifth Edition*. Stipes Publishing, Champaign, Illinois. 1187 pp.

Flint, H.L. 1997. *Landscape plants for Eastern North America*. Second Edition. John Wiley and Sons, New York, New York. 842 pp.

Greene, W.F. & H.L. Blomquist 1953. *Flowers of the South: Native and exotic*. University of North Carolina Press. Chapel Hill, North Carolina. 208 pp.

Halfacre, R.G. & A.R. Showcroft 1979. *Landscape plants of the Southeast*. Sparks Press, Raleigh, North Carolina. 325 pp.

Hamel, P.B. & M.U. Chiltoskey 1975. *Cherokee plants and their uses: A 400-year history*. Herald Publishing Company, Sylva, North Carolina. 65 pp.

Isley, D. 1990. *Vascular flora of the Southeastern United States, Volume 3, Part 2, Leguminosae (Fabaceae)*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. 258 pp.

Moerman, D.E. 1998. *Native American ethnobotany*. Timber Press, Portland, Oregon. 927 pp.

Moerman, D.E. 1999. *Native American Ethnobotany Database: Foods, drugs, dyes and fibers of native North American Peoples*. The University of Michigan-Dearborn. [Online]. Available: <http://www.umd.umich.edu/cgi-bin/herb>

(27 June 2001).

Ottensen, C. 1995. *The native plant primer*. Harmony Books, New York, New York. 354 pp.

Rogers, D.J. & C. Rogers 1991. *Woody ornamentals for Deep South gardens*. University of West Florida Press, Pensacola, Florida. 296 pp.

Small, J.K. 1933. *Manual of Southeastern flora*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. 1554 pp.

Swanson, R.E. 1994. *A field guide to the trees and shrubs of the Southern Appalachians*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland. 399 pp.

Swanton, J.R. 2000. *Creek religion and medicine*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, Nebraska. 684 pp.

Taylor, L.A. 1940. *Plants used as curatives by certain Southeastern tribes*. Botanical Museum of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. 88 pp.

Whitthoft, J. 1947. *An early Cherokee ethnobotanical note* (Communicated by W.N. Fenton). *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences* 37(3): 73-75.

Young, J.A. & C.G. Young 1992. *Seeds of woody plants in North America*. Dioscorides Press, Portland, Oregon. 407 pp.

Prepared By

Diana L. Immel
USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center, c/o Environmental Horticulture Department, University of California, Davis, California

Species Coordinator

M. Kat Anderson
USDA, NRCS, National Plant Data Center, c/o Environmental Horticulture Department, University of California, Davis, California

27sep01.jsp

For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS <<http://plants.usda.gov>> and Plant Materials Program Web sites <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status.

(Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.