

Redbud - *Cercis canadensis/reniformis*

A favorite ornamental tree admired for its early lavender-pink flowers before many trees have leafed out is the Redbud. There are essentially three in Texas: the Texas redbud, Oklahoma redbud, and Mexican redbud.

There is much debate over distinguishing these ornamental trees, but they have interbred so much the pure forms are few. Redbuds can be seen all over the State and bloom time ranges from late February into March.

Texas redbud grows on thin, calcareous well-drained soils. It is smaller and more drought tolerant than its eastern relative, with thick, leathery, much smaller leaves that have wavy margins. The waxy upper surface of the leaves helps retard transpiration. It is most commonly multi-trunked. The Oklahoma redbud leaves are typically pointed and thick with dark green on both sides. Its native area extends throughout Texas.

Oklahoma redbud does well in most soils, acidic to alkaline, so long as they do not stay soggy. This somewhat fast-growing tree that can reach 30-40 feet high requires little care.

The Mexican redbud typically grows in the western parts of the State, including Pecos, Terrell, Brewster, and Val Verde counties. The Texas redbud is just as drought tolerant than its Oklahoma cousin, *Cercis reniformis*. Texas redbud is typically multi-trunked, while the Oklahoma redbud is single trunked.

Redbud seedpods are legumes that turn a reddish color which mature in late summer and may form clusters that remain attached into winter. Bark is thin, gray or reddish-brown with occasional white "bloches" on the bark. Use the redbud as a showy ornamental in early spring, shade for a patio, or accent trees in groups of three. Propagate this delightful ornamental by budding, starting seeds in the fall. Cultivars can be grafted, or propagated by cuttings in summer under mist.

Pests and Diseases

Canker presents the most problems for redbuds. The fungus enters the tree through a damaged branch or dead/dying branches. There is no chemical control, just prune out the diseased limbs. Treehoppers and scale will sometimes infest redbud, but scale can be controlled using horticultural sprays. Verticillium wilt attacks and kills redbud, so fertilize and prune out the wilted branch.

*Interesting features of the redbud:

- According to legend, a relative of the redbud was used by Judas Iscariot to hang himself in biblical times.
- As a member of the legume family, the redbud can fix nitrogen from the air to use as a nutrient.

* information from Floridata.

