Eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), also called Judas tree, is an outstanding, deciduous ornamental tree in South Carolina. This is a small tree native to the eastern United States and Canada, with lavender-pink blossoms that open early in spring and are as colorful as any flowering spring tree in the landscape. It is adapted to all areas of South Carolina.

**Mature Height/Spread**

Redbuds always remain small, maturing at 20 to 30 feet in height and 15 to 35 feet in width. They generally grow as a small tree with a divided trunk close to the ground. The spreading crown is usually rounded to flat-topped. It can develop as a multi-trunk shrub. Redbuds growing in the sun will be compact and rounded; when grown in shade, their form is loose, open and tall.

**Growth Rate**

Redbuds grow at a moderate rate, about 7 to 10 feet in five to six years. They tend to be short-lived, often declining from disease after about 20 years.

**Ornamental Features**

The most appealing feature of this tree is the showy flower, which is magenta in bud, but opens to lavender-pink before the leaves emerge early in spring. The flowers appear in clusters that nearly cover the bare branches of the tree. They remain for two to three weeks. They usually appear in early spring after the white flowers of serviceberry and wild plum and before (and during) the white and pink flowers of the flowering dogwood. Although the flower of the species is lavender-pink, certain varieties and cultivars have white, magenta-pink or rosy pink flowers. The heart-shaped leaves are reddish as they emerge, and gradually turn dark green in summer. The fall color is yellow.

*Cercis canadensis* var. *texensis* (Texas redbud) and its cultivars are from warmer parts of the Southwest. These all have similar flowers, but thicker leaves and more heat tolerance. However, they are less cold hardy than the straight species of Eastern redbud (*C. canadensis*).
The fruit are long, flat pods (3 inches) which are produced from late summer into fall, and remain on the tree during winter. They become conspicuous in the fall when the leaves drop, and can sometimes be unsightly when mature.

Redbuds tolerate moderate dry spells, but do better when irrigated in summer dry spells.

Transplant when very small, as they have difficulty surviving, transplant after the root system has developed.

As redbud is native to such a wide range of climates, it is important that you purchase a tree that was grown from locally harvested seed. Trees grown from seed collected from trees native to South Carolina will adapt to our climate. If the seed were collected from trees grown in the north, the tree may not withstand the heat of our summer.

When located near a walkway or patio, low branches must be pruned for clearance beneath the canopy. It can be trained to grow with a single or multiple trunks. Prune out dead branches.

**Problems**

Redbuds are very susceptible to Botryosphaeria canker and dieback on the branches. This is a fungal disease that enters twigs and branches, feeds on the living tissue below the bark, and spreads around the stem. Once it encircles the branch, the water supply beyond that point is cut off to the leaves. The branch will suddenly wilt and die. Redbuds that are under drought stress will more easily succumb to Botryosphaeria canker than a well-watered tree.

Apply mulch out as far as the drip line of the limbs. Mulch will keep the soil cooler and more evenly moist in the summer. Pruning out the diseased branches and disposing of the cuttings will significantly help to reduce disease. Prune when the stems and foliage are dry. Cut the stem 6-8” below where any sunken, cracked or diseased area is, and disinfect the pruners between cuts with a spray of rubbing alcohol on the pruners. Water the plants well weekly. Fertilize them during the spring at six-week intervals with a slow-release tree & shrub fertilizer.

Wounds created by pruning or mechanical injury serve as entry points for the fungus that infects the wood and causes cankers. Avoid wounding to minimize susceptibility to this disease. There are no fungicides to control Botryosphaeria canker.

**Landscape Use**

This tree is best used in naturalized areas, where the flowers are contrasted against evergreens or woodlands. It can be used as a specimen or in groupings in a shrub border.

Although the redbud does well in most soil types, it prefers moist, well-drained sites. It does not, however, like those that are permanently wet. It tolerates acid or alkaline soils. It grows well in full sun but prefers some shade in the heat of summer. Although it will grow in fairly dense shade, it blooms more heavily when exposed to sun.
Insects such as granulate ambrosia beetle, black twig borer, treehoppers, caterpillars, scales and leafhoppers can also cause damage.

**Upright Cultivars & Varieties**

- 'Forest Pansy' – This is one of the most popular cultivars. It has deep burgundy foliage that loses its intense color in the heat of summer, becoming almost dark green. Flowers are more rose purple than the species and open a little later.

  ![New reddish-purple foliage on 'Forest Pansy' redbud (Cercis canadensis).](image1)

  Joey Williamson, ©2012 HGIC, Clemson Extension

- 'Merlot' – Semi-upright habit with purple, thick foliage and heat tolerance. A hybrid of ‘Forest Pansy’ (purple foliage) and ‘Texas White’ (var. texensis).

  ![Purple-leafed ‘Merlot’ redbud (Cercis x ‘Merlot’).](image2)

  Dennis Werner, ©2013 NC State University

  ‘Merlot' redbud (Cercis x ‘Merlot’) in bloom.
  Dennis Werner, ©2013 NC State University

- ‘Ace of Hearts’ – Similar to species except flower color is much pinker. A compact tree that grows to 12 feet tall.

  ![‘Ace of Hearts’ redbud (Cercis canadensis) in bloom.](image3)

  Joey Williamson, ©2013 HGIC, Clemson Extension

  ‘Ace of Hearts’ redbud (Cercis canadensis) in bloom.
  Joey Williamson, ©2013 HGIC, Clemson Extension

  ![‘Ace of Hearts’ (Cercis canadensis) redbud flowers.](image4)

  Joey Williamson, ©2013 HGIC, Clemson Extension

  ‘Ace of Hearts’ (Cercis canadensis) redbud flowers.
  Joey Williamson, ©2013 HGIC, Clemson Extension
- ‘Hearts of Gold’ – Spring foliage is intense golden-yellow and gradually changes to chartreuses as the summer advances. More golden foliage in full sun. Grows to 15 feet tall and has lavender-pink flowers.

- Carolina Sweetheart™ (‘NCCC1’) – Following the pink flowers of spring, the foliage of this cultivar emerges rich maroon, and slowly change to shades of white, green, and hot pink. All leaves eventually turn green in summer with dusted white margins.

- ‘Whitewater’ – Variegated white and green foliage and a weeping growth habit. A hybrid of ‘Silver Cloud’ (variegated foliage) and ‘Covey’ (weeping).

- ‘Pink Pom Poms’ (PPAF) – This double flowered redbud is a hybrid of the double flowered ‘Flame’ Eastern redbud and ‘Oklahoma’ Texas redbud. The resulting cross has thick, glossy green foliage and dark pink-purple, double pom pom-like flowers. The cultivar is also sterile, so no seed pods are made.
• var. *alba* - This is a white-flowered form that occurs somewhat frequently in nature. The foliage is a lighter green than the species and new growth is yellow-green. Comes true to type from seed if isolated from cross-pollination by the pink-flowered redbuds.

![White-flowered redbud (Cercis canadensis var. alba).](image) Karen Russ, ©2010 HGIC, Clemson Extension

• 'Royal White’ – This cultivar has larger and more abundant flowers and a more compact form than var. *alba*.

• var. *texensis* ‘Texas White’ – Glossy thick leaves and white flowers. Grows to 15 to 20 feet tall and may have multiple trunks.

• var. *texensis* ‘Oklahoma’ – Glossy thick leaves and lavender-pink flowers. Grows to 15 to 20 feet tall and may have multiple trunks.

**Weeping Cultivars**

• ‘Traveler’ – A selection of var. *texensis*, with a broad mound shape and weeping (gracefully arching) branches. Leaves are dark and glossy, and flowers are lavender-pink. Grows to 5 feet tall and 5 to 12 feet wide.

• ‘Covey’ Lavender Twist™ – A weeping form with arching branches that creates an umbrella-shaped crown. Leaves are a rich green, and fall color is golden yellow.

• ‘Ruby Falls’ – Has a unique combination of weeping growth habit and purple foliage. A hybrid of ‘Covey’ (weeping) and ‘Forest Pansy’ (purple foliage).

![‘Traveler’ weeping redbud (Cercis canadensis var. texensis).](image) Joey Williamson, ©2012 HGIC, Clemson Extension

![‘Lavender Twist’ weeping redbud (Cercis canadensis).](image) Joey Williamson, ©2011 HGIC, Clemson Extension

![‘Ruby Falls’ (Cercis x ‘Ruby Falls’) weeping redbud with purple foliage.](image) Dennis Werner, ©2013 NC State University
Related Species

- Chinese redbud (C. chinensis) – This is a small, multi-stemmed shrub that grows 6 to 8 feet tall and wide. Its rosy purple flowers are showier and more profuse than Eastern Redbud. Leaves are also thicker.

- Giant redbud (C. gigantea) – From China. Foliage is glossy and dark green. Leaves are 6 to 8 inches across. Grows to 15 to 20 feet tall.

Note: Chemical control of diseases and insects on large trees is usually not feasible since adequate coverage of the foliage with a pesticide cannot be achieved.


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