Bartlett Tree Research Laboratories

PLANT HEALTH CARE REPORT

Eastern Redbud

Eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) is one of the most subtly attractive, small native trees found in the landscape. This species has small white, pink, or purple flowers in early spring and deep green leaves in the summer. Fall coloration can be a bright yellow but is usually a dull yellow-green. Redbud is attractive when mixed with dogwood or other spring-flowering trees, especially in woodland or naturalized landscapes. It is also very desirable near houses since it complements the scale of one-story homes.

Eastern redbud is grown from plant hardiness zone 4 (Minnesota) south to zone 9 (Texas). A number of varieties of redbud are available as well as several closely related species. When selecting a tree for northern areas, select only northern strains such as those from Wisconsin or Minnesota. In dry areas, select western strains. Popular redbuds include:

'Forest Pansy': purple leaves and flowers; hardy from zones 6–9

'Alba': white-flowering

'Pinkbud': pink-flowering; western strain

Red leaves of *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy'
Photo courtesy of flickr.com

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‘Royal White’: white-flowering; northern strain

Chinese redbud (*Cercis chinensis*): rosy purple flowers; shrub form <10’; zones 6–9

Western redbud (*Cercis occidentalis*): California native; tree or shrub form grows to 12’; zone 7

‘Oklahoma’ (*Cercis canadensis* var. *texensis*): dark red flowers; waxy, dark green leaves; western strain

‘Texas White’ (*Cercis canadensis* var. *texen*sis): white-flowering, similar to ‘Oklahoma’

Growth and flowering are best in full sun or light shade. When planted in full sun, redbud must be watered regularly during periods of drought. Soils should be well drained, but young trees will adapt to all but constantly wet sites. It is tolerant of a wide range of soil pH from 4.5 to 7.5.

When young, the growth rate of eastern redbud is moderate to fast; as it matures, the growth rate slows. Eastern redbud will grow to 30 feet with a branch spread of 25 to 35 feet. Maximum growth is achieved with regular fertilization and watering. It can tolerate both heat and cold as long as the change is not too fast.

Structural pruning is required on most young redbuds to ensure that their shape is attractive and stable at maturity. Pruning should remove dead, dying, and diseased branches as well as weak attachments and crossing branches. The

Monitoring and Treatment Considerations for Eastern Redbud

Late winter

Monitor for scales; treat as needed. Expose and inspect root collar for problems. Add mulch as necessary. Remove dead, dying, diseased, and broken branches. Sample soil for nutrient and pH levels.

Mid-spring

Apply fungicide treatment to suppress anthracnose and leaf spot as needed. Apply bark treatment to prevent borers. Monitor for borers, scales, and caterpillar defoliators; treat as needed. Fertilize, adjust pH, and amend soil according to soil analysis.

Late spring

Repeat fungicide treatment to suppress anthracnose and leaf spot as needed. Monitor for borers, sucking insects, and caterpillar defoliators; treat as needed.

Early summer

Repeat bark treatment to prevent borers as needed. Reduce or remove branches to improve structure and appearance after flowering. Remove watersprouts. Monitor irrigation and soil moisture to minimize water stress and prevent root disease.

breakage of weak branches is one of the leading causes of tree loss in this species.

In some years, seed production can be a problem. Heavy pod set along branches produces an untidy appearance. When planted in mulched or naturalized areas, germinating seeds can produce a wealth of young trees.

Canker-causing fungi are the most serious disease problems of redbud. These fungi infect major branches and the stem, cutting off the flow of nutrients. Most canker fungi target a tree under stress that has an open wound for infection. The most common stress factor is summer drought. Verticillium wilt is another fungal disease that produces similar symptoms to cankers. Both of these diseases are first seen as single branch dieback that may spread to the entire tree. *Verticillium* first infects roots and spreads to the stem. Several leaf spot fungi, including anthracnose, attack this species during wet springs.

Old or stressed trees are often attacked by wood-boring insects. These insects are first noticed from the frass that accumulates at the base of the tree or from sap oozing from holes in the bark. A number of leaf-feeding insects are also attracted to redbud. These include tent caterpillars, leafhoppers, treehoppers, leafrollers, weevils, and other leaf-feeding caterpillars. Branches are often attacked by scale insects, including greedy, oleander, lecanium, and terrapin.

Mid to late summer

Repeat bark treatment to prevent borers. Monitor for sucking insects and leaf-feeders; treat as needed. Monitor irrigation and soil moisture to minimize water stress and prevent root disease.

Fall

If sucking insects were problematic this past growing season, consider treating with an appropriately timed systemic product. Expose and inspect root collar for problems. Monitor irrigation and soil moisture to minimize winter injury.